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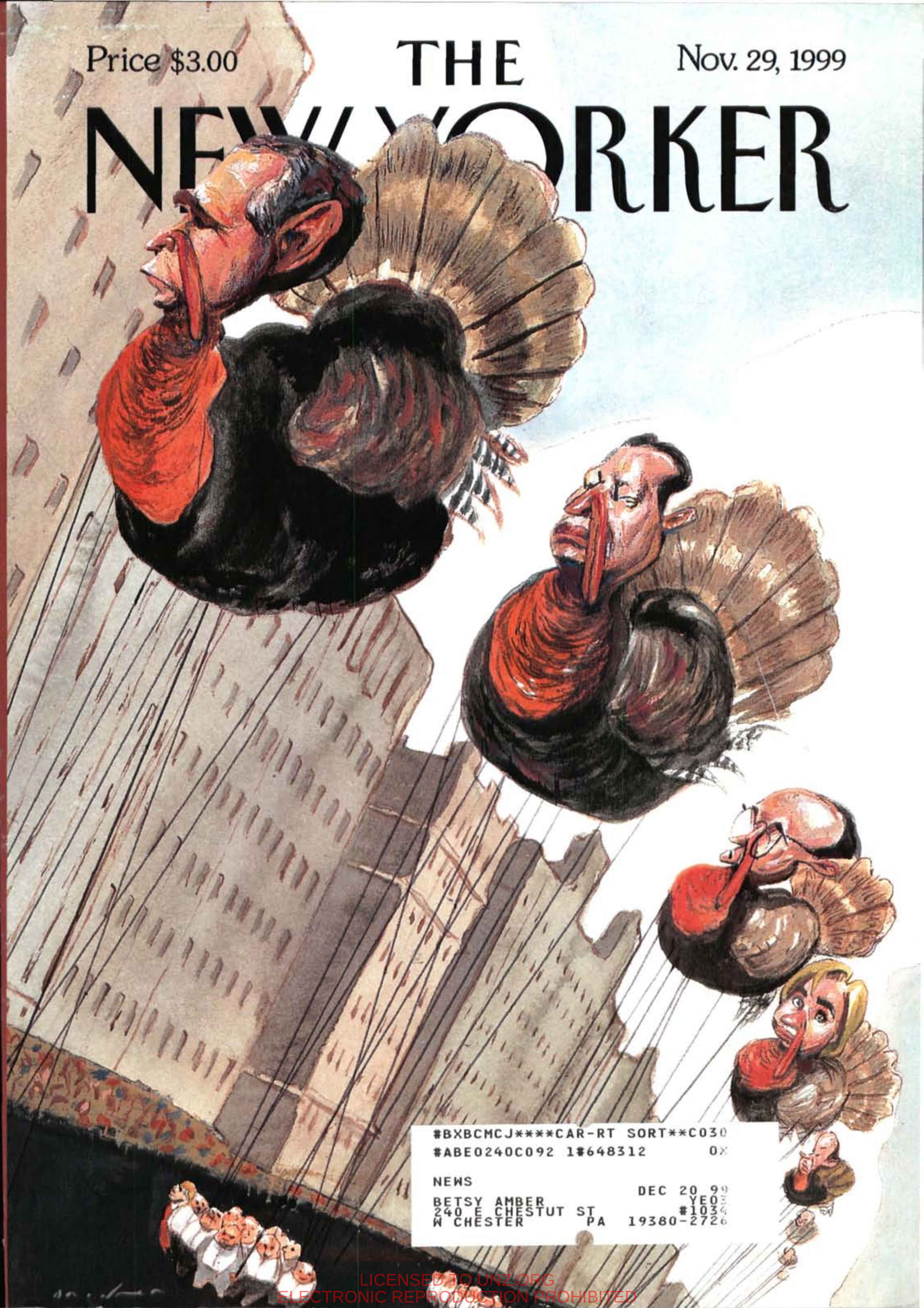
Nov. 29, 1999



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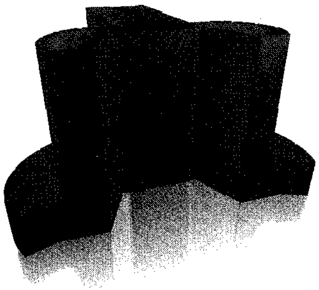

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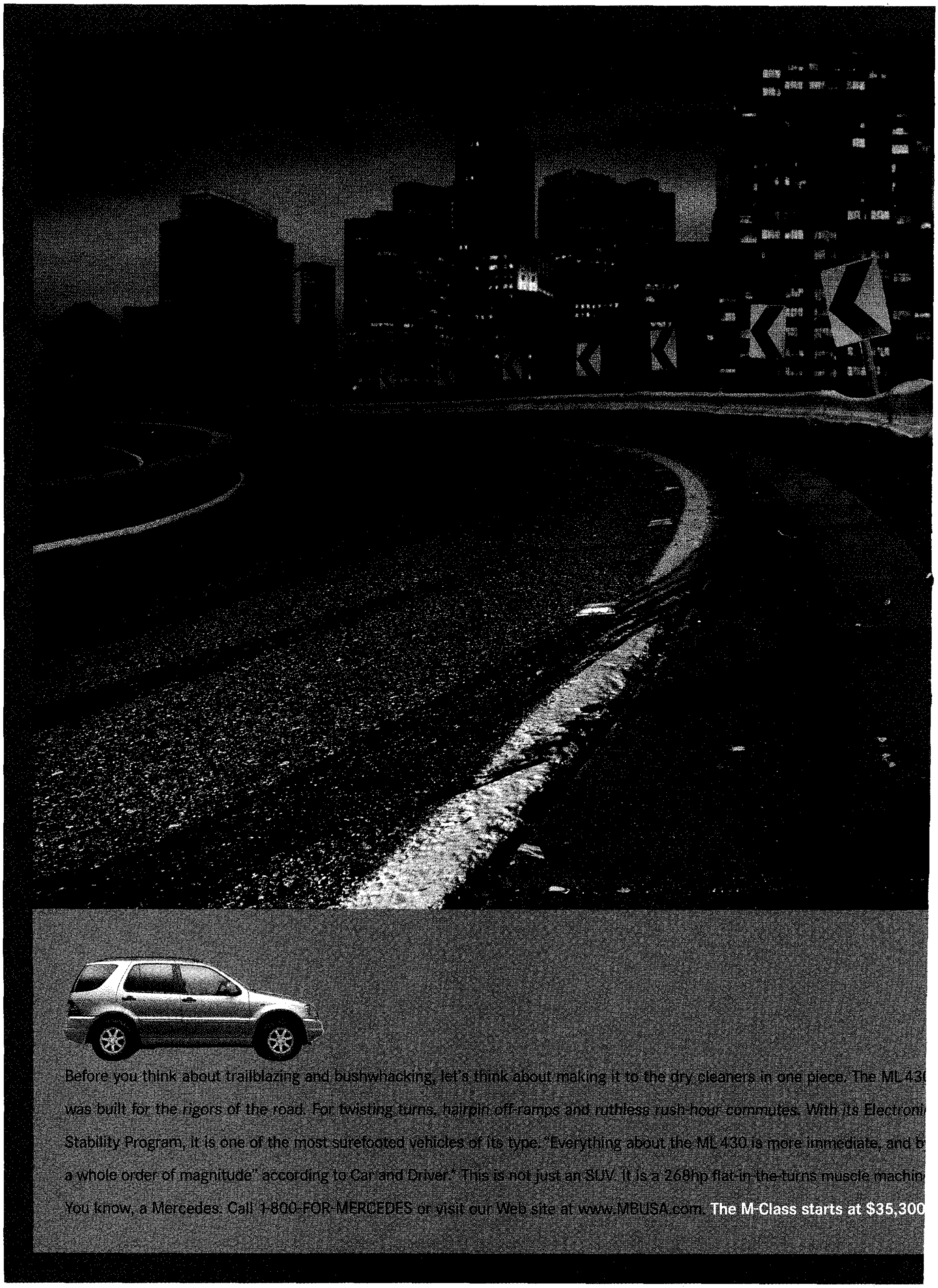

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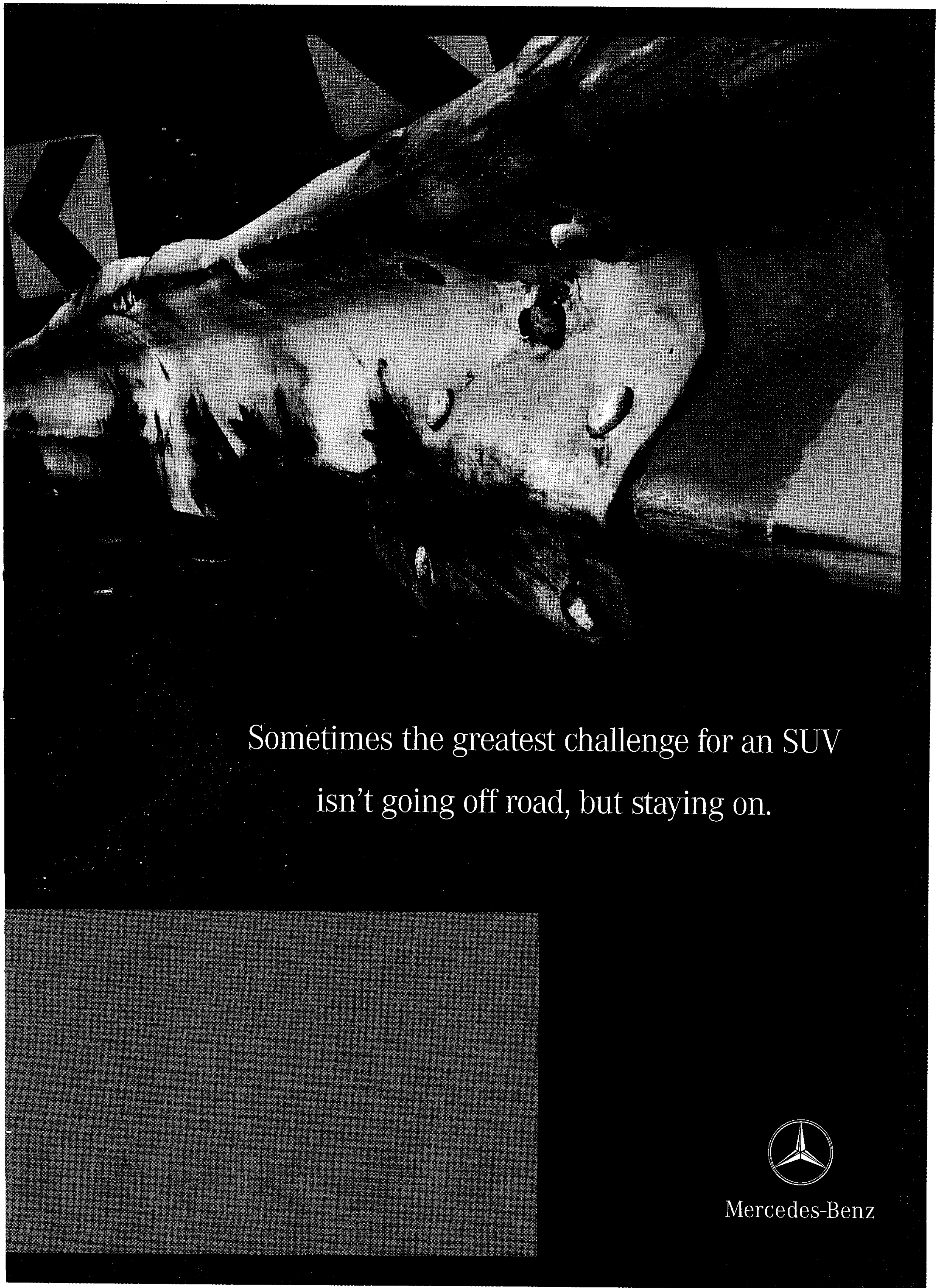
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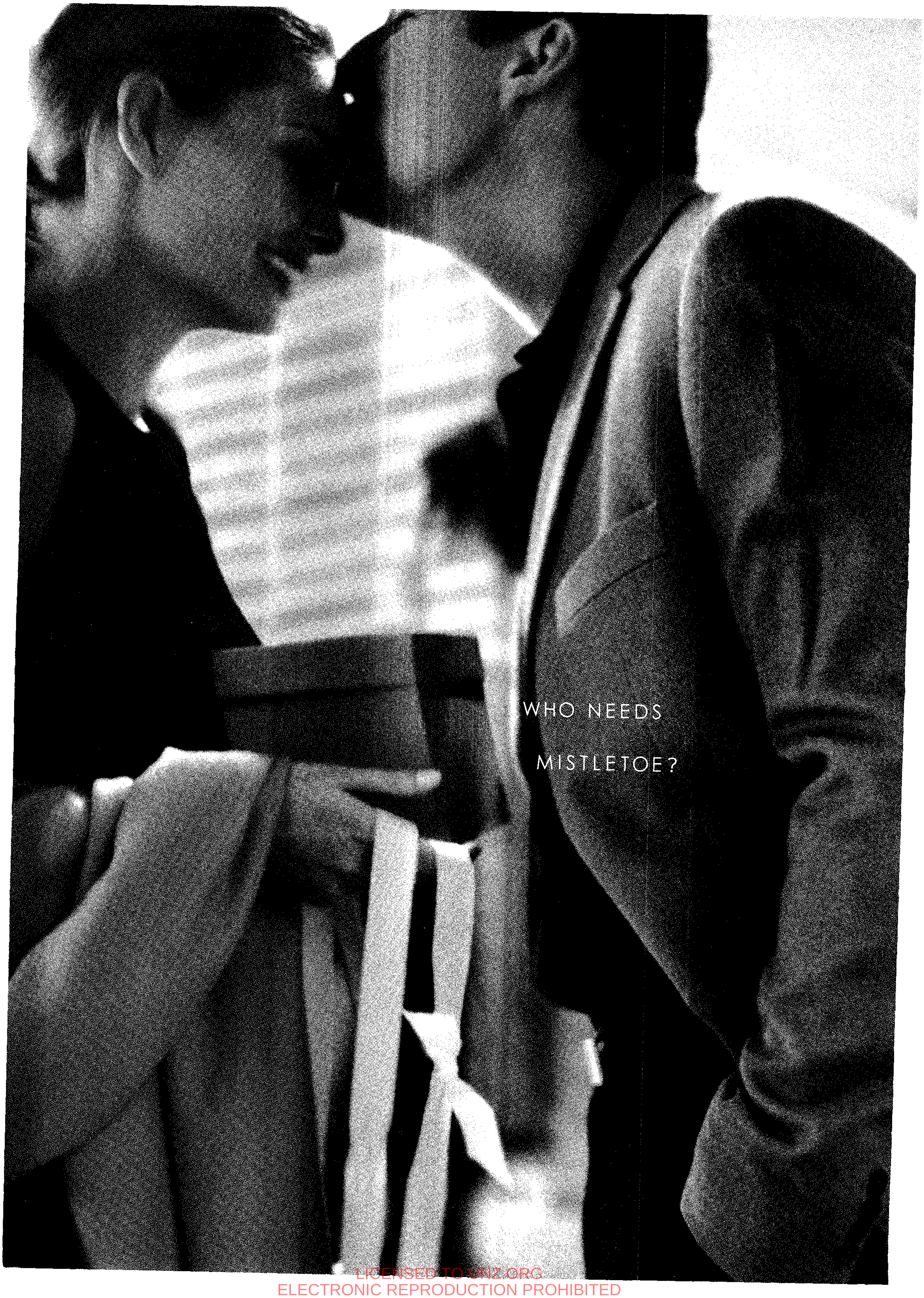
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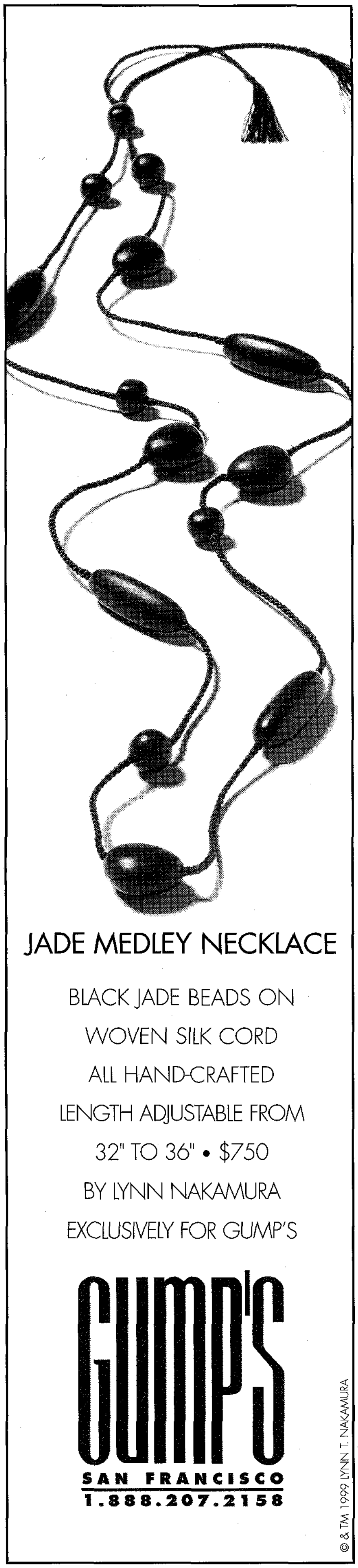
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THE NEW YORKER

NOVEMBER 29, 1999

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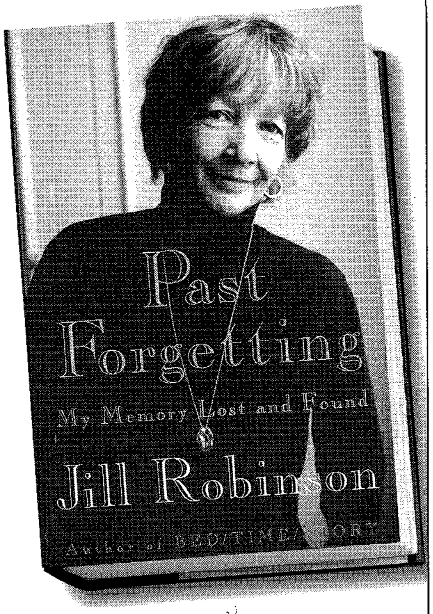

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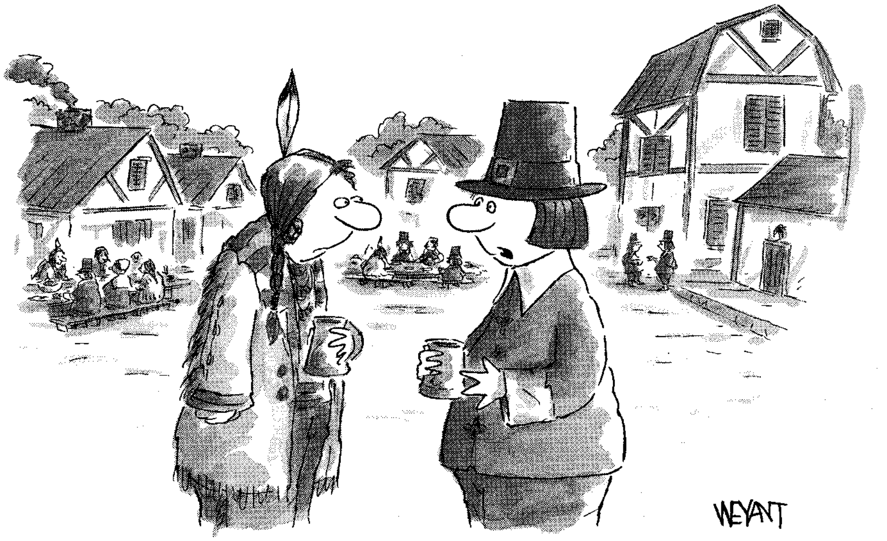

"Actually, the attraction wasn't freedom from religious persecution but, rather, the all-you-can-eat buffet."

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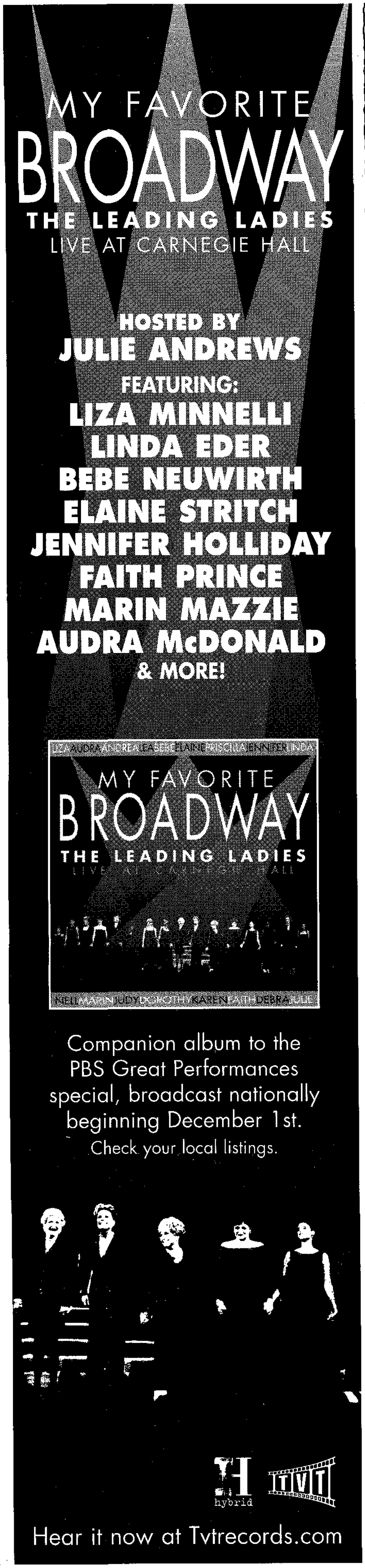

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THE MAIL

A NOT SO SECRET AGENDA

It's amusing that Elizabeth Kolbert ("It's Only Money," November 8th) would conclude a *magazine* article on Steve Forbes's Presidential bid with the comment "there is no rational explanation for what he is doing." How about: He's trying to sell magazines? Both his grandfather and his father built up the family publishing empire with their colorful personalities and iconoclastic opinions. Steve inherited the business (along with his brothers and sisters), and he is smart enough to realize that he did not inherit the personality gene. What to do? Buy advertising at the political rate (mandated by law to be offered at the lowest available cost) in every state. Promote opinions that mirror the consensus of the business community (*Forbes's* natural readership). Stand back and watch as these opinions are duly reported in the hundreds of columns speculating on the Presidential race. Gain unlimited access to the airways, debate the most visible people on the planet... Well, you get the idea.

WILLIAM B. HUBER
New York City

THE EVOLUTION OF SLEEP

John Seabrook's article "Sleeping with the Baby" (November 8th) lacks a vital piece of biological information about co-sleeping. Our ancestors began walking on two legs four million years ago, and this evolutionary leap led to changes in the architecture of the human pelvis and in the size and shape of the human birth canal. About three million years after that, we experienced a rapid increase in brain size, overstressing the already tight fit between an infant's head and the birth canal. As a result, human infants are born too early—by some estimates, three months too early—and are neurologically unfinished compared with other mammal babies. Thus, human infants are highly dependent, and expect to be entwined physically and emotionally with an adult member of their species during the day and the night.

MEREDITH F. SMALL
Professor of Anthropology, Cornell Univ.
Ithaca, N.Y.

I sympathize with John Seabrook, because my middle child was a terrible sleeper, waking every two hours throughout the first months of her life. I finally broke down and Ferberized her at eleven months. Whether or not a new parent chooses to sleep with the baby, he or she must accept reality: you will not get a full night's sleep three days in a row for at least five years. It's funny, though. My daughter, now thirteen, is nearly impossible to wake. Needless to say, she is a normal, well-adjusted teen-ager.

LYN STEVENS
Riverdale, N.Y.

BRIGHT COLLEGE YEARS

The most revealing number on George W. Bush's academic record (The Talk of the Town, November 8th) is the "predicted average" that was secretly prepared for some entering students. (It's listed under the "Pred." heading.) While I was at Yale, in the late nineteen-sixties, a friend of mine interned in an administrative office, and he gave several of us copies of our records. None of us received a predicted average as low as the 71 given to George W. Bush. The administration would have made this prediction with a high degree of confidence, given their extensive experience with Andover grads. When you compare that predicted average of 71 with Bush's actual averages, which ranged from 75 to 81 (remember, this was before grade inflation), it seems that a revision is in order: George W. Bush was a student who significantly beat expectations.

FRANK DOBBS
New York City

DON'T FORGET TO VOTE: The ballot for the first annual *New Yorker* Book Awards can be found on page 64.

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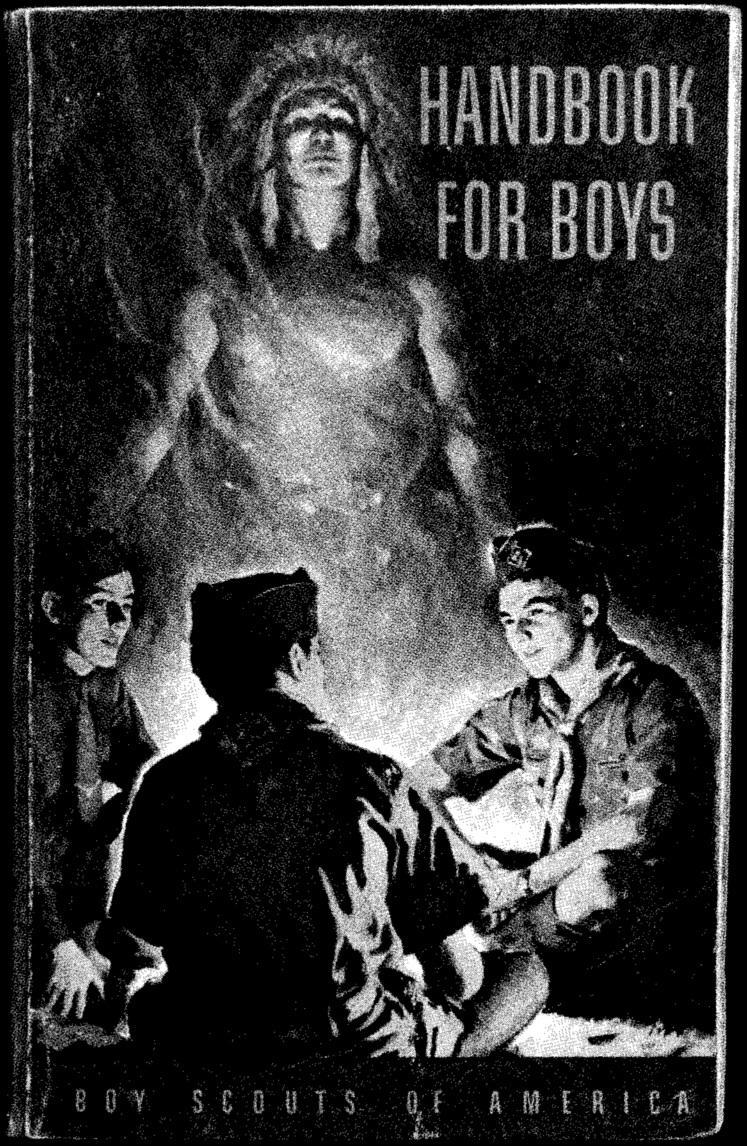
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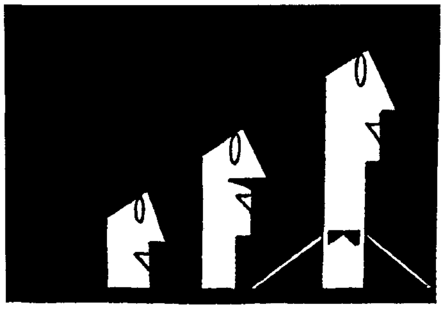

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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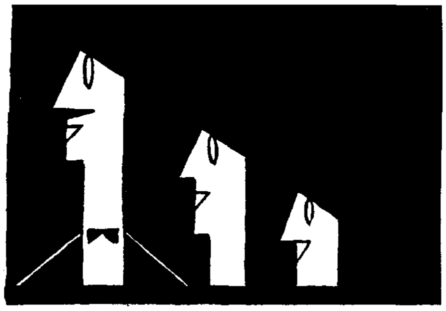


THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

(Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.)

Adobe Theatre Company—The troupe's new show, which has an unprintably saucy title, is "part satire and part low comedy (way low!)" and allegedly follows in the footprints of Lassie, Rin Tin Tin, and Benji. In previews through Nov. 27. Opens Nov. 28 at 8. (Ohio Theatre, 66 Wooster St. 279-4200.)

Enter the Night—The Signature Theatre Company's Maria Irene Fornes season continues with a 1993 drama. (555 W. 42nd St. 244-7529.)

Hamlet—Liev Schreiber portrays the prince, in a Public Theatre staging directed by Andrei Serban. In previews. (425 Lafayette St. 239-6200.)

If Memory Serves—Elizabeth Ashley is a fading television actress whose son (Sam Trammell) causes a scandal by making his recollections of his childhood public, in a comedy by Jonathan Tolins. Directed by Leonard Foglia. Previews begin Nov. 26. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 239-6200.)

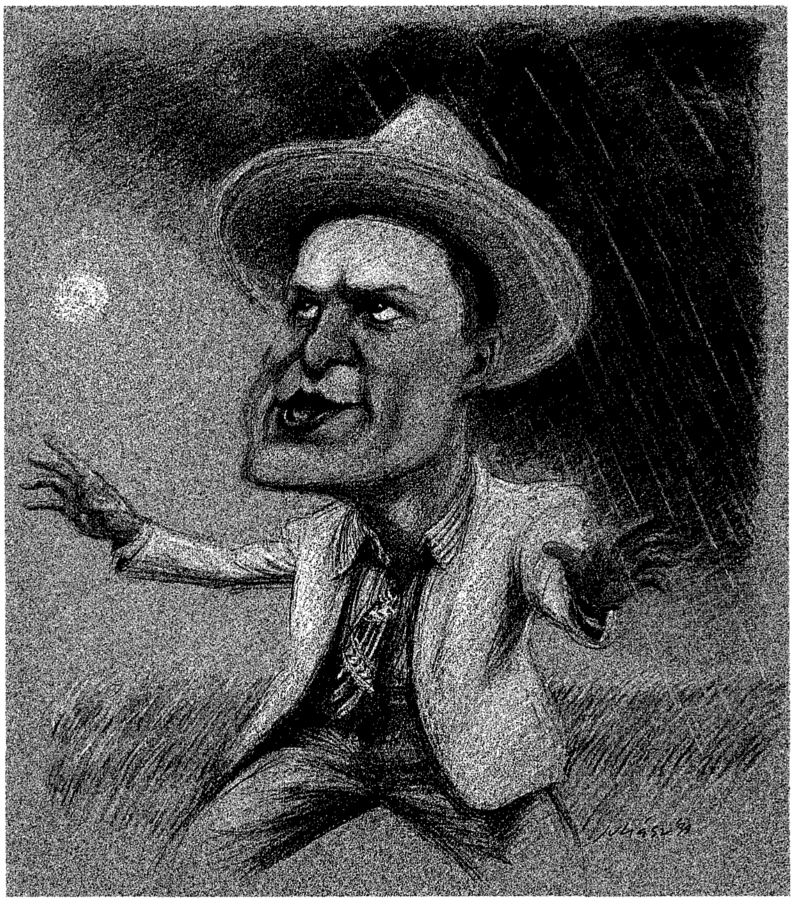
Jolson & Co.—The York Theatre Company kicks off the season with a musical about the life of Al Jolson. In previews. (Theatre at St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 239-6200.)

Marie Christine—Michael John LaChiusa's new musical, set in New Orleans in the eighteen-hundreds, starring Audra McDonald. Graciela Daniele is the director. In previews. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

Refuge—Neil Pepe directs a play by Jessica Goldberg, in which a woman is left to care for her feeble brother and troubled sister when her parents move to Florida. In previews. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 315-2120.)

Shyster—Fisher Stevens, Annabella Sciorra, and Phyllis Newman are in the cast of a comedy by Bryan Goluboff, staged by Naked Angels. In previews through Nov. 28. Opens Nov. 30 at 8. (Blue Heron, 123 E. 24th St. 279-4200.)

Space—A scientist encounters three people with similar stories about contact with otherworldly beings, in a drama by Tina Landau ("Floyd Collins"). Ms. Landau is the director. In previews. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200.)



Woody Harrelson, in "The Rainmaker," at the Brooks Atkinson.

Swing!—A musical salute to the genre, starring the jazz vocalist Ann Hampton Callaway. Directed and choreographed by Lynne Taylor-Corbett. In previews. (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

Trudy Blue—In the latest play from Marsha Norman ("'night, Mother"), Polly Draper stars as a successful Manhattan novelist in a moment of crisis. In previews. (MCC, 120 W. 28th St. 727-7765.)

True History and Real Adventures—Michael Mayer directs a musical play by Sybille Pearson, about a Scottish girl who comes to America at the turn of the century in search of Calamity Jane. Kathleen Chalfant is in the cast. In previews. (Vineyard Theatre, 108 E. 15th St. 353-3366.)

Y2K—James Naughton and Patricia Kalember portray an affluent New York couple whose lives are turned upside down by a computer hacker, in a drama by Arthur Kopit. In previews. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 239-6200).

OPENED RECENTLY

Ancestral Voices—A staged reading, with a rotating cast, of A. R. Gurney's play. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

Contact—The director and choreographer Susan Stroman's dance play, co-conceived with John Weidman, is a triptych of simple stories about the various forms of human connection, the atmosphere of longing. It's a big-hearted, witty crowd-pleaser—startling and fresh and free from the infernal pretentiousness of Broadway. (Reviewed in our issue of 10/18-25/99.) (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

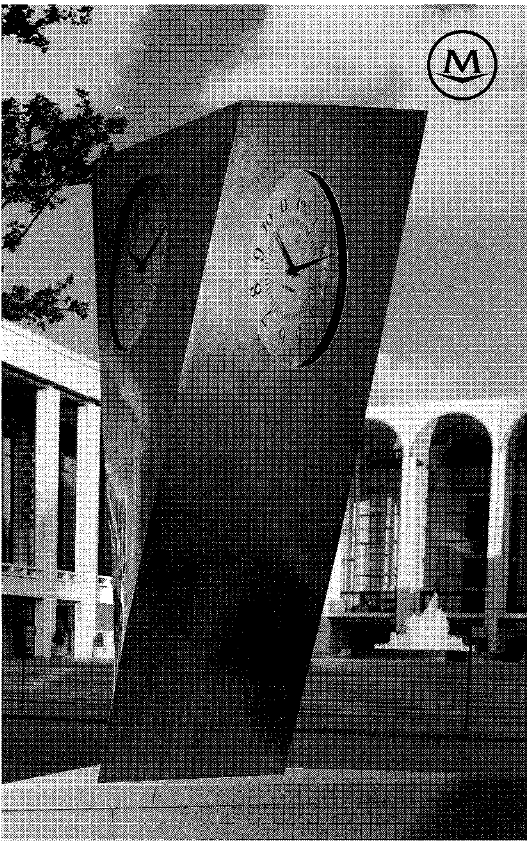
Contact with the Enemy—In Frank D. Gilroy's drama, two Second World War veterans are accidentally reunited at the United States Holocaust Museum. (Ensemble Studio Theatre, 549 W. 52nd St. 247-4982.)

The Country Club—Douglas Carter Beane's satire on the young suburban set is loaded with witty dialogue, and the production is graced by the Drama Dept.'s always good acting and a fine set, but Beane's writing suffers from a peculiar shallowness almost worthy of his characters. They satirize themselves, too, but it all has the effect of a valentine rather than a biting sendup. (Greenwich House, 27 Barrow St. 541-8441. Closes Dec. 18.)

Dame Edna: The Royal Tour—Former housewife turned international entertainer Dame Edna Everage (the sublime comic creation of the Australian Dadaist and dandy Barry Humphries) is, to adopt her penchant for alliteration, a virago of vitriol, a harpy of happiness, a megastar of maliciousness. She's also a bit like Tinkerbell, real if the audience believes in her, and it's a testament to the power of the character and of Humphries's performance that she compels instant belief. (11/1/99) (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Dinner with Friends—Donald Margulies's new play concerns two upper-middle-class couples who have been married for a dozen or so years; one of them survives the wear and tear of marriage, and the other doesn't. It's an intelligent depiction of the mystery and the mundanity of marriage—Margulies avoids making his characters' situations schematic or inevitable—and Matthew Arkin, Lisa Emery, Kevin Kilner, and Julie White give well-rounded performances. Directed by Daniel Sullivan. (Variety Arts, 110 Third Ave., at 14th St. 239-6200.)

Eclipsed—Patricia Burke Brogan's drama, set in Ireland, follows the lives of four unwed mothers forced to labor as penitents in a convent laundry. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737.)



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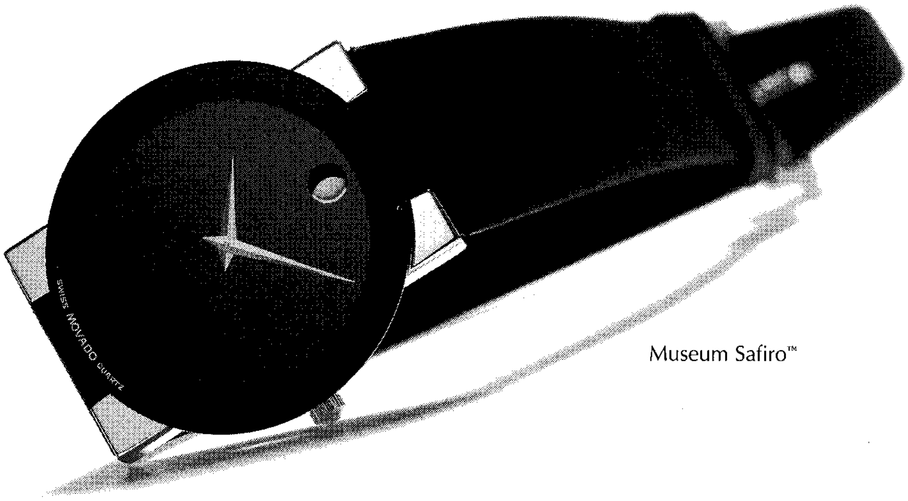

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1839—Gale Gates et al.'s new production is a multimedia meditation on the mind of Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, the inventor of the daguerreotype. (37 Main St., Brooklyn. 718-522-4597.)

EPIC PROPORTIONS—A spoof of the making of a Biblical movie on location in the Arizona desert during the early thirties; it dramatizes many plagues, but no plague greater than the one that corporate culture has visited on Broadway in the last few years. What's strange in a piece that has no ear for the moment is that it contains the pitch-perfect performance of Kristin Chenoweth, a comedienne of terrific originality and charm. (10/18-25/99) (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

THE EXACT CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE—An amiable comedy, lightly seasoned with insight, about a classic Southern dragon-lady mother. Joan Vail Thorne's script has some sharply written jokes, John Tillinger's direction is flawless, and Frances Sternhagen, as the mother, gives a beautiful performance. (Century Theatre, 111 E. 15th St. 239-6200.)

Brian Friel's "Give Me Your Answer, Do!," at the Gramercy.

RICHARD MERKIN

AN EXPERIMENT WITH AN AIR PUMP—The odd title of Shelagh Stevenson's play describes a study carried out by its eighteenth-century characters; their attempt to determine how much oxygen deprivation animals can endure neatly encapsulates the play's themes—the relationships between science and morality, scientific passion and love, knowledge and society's stability—which are explored with humor and intelligence. Set both at the end of the eighteenth century and on our own upcoming millennial New Year's Eve, the play smoothly plumbs its engaging characters' fears of the future while puncturing our pompous notion that this New Year is different from all others. The cast, led by Linda Emond and Daniel Gerroll, is uniformly fine; deftly directed by Doug Hughes. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 313 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Closes Dec. 12.)

FUDDY MEERS—The very promising playwright David Lindsay-Abaire's kitchen-sink comedy goes so over the top that you might miss the melancholy beneath the absurd chaos. In a cast of characters (played by the best comic ensemble in years) which includes a blissful amnesiac, a maimed criminal with a speech impediment, a protective mother whose stroke has rendered her Caryl Churchill cryptic, and a sweet kook who expresses his anger with a hand puppet, no one is who they seem and everyone is connected in surprising ways, and through surprising needs—the *Über*-dysfunctional family? The point seems to be that in this upside-down world, saying what you need to say is not only difficult but also a privilege, and memory is as much a burden as a blessing. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

GHOSTS—Ibsen's 1881 drama. (Century Theatre, 111 E. 15th St. 279-4200.)

GIVE ME YOUR ANSWER, DO!—In Brian Friel's latest drama, two Irish friends and novelists, one a commercial failure, the other a best-seller, come together with their wives (and some in-laws and a literary archivist) for a late-summer afternoon of cocktails and angst. The whole thing builds to a vaguely "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" fervor in the second act, but the performances are exhilarating, so you forgive the unnecessarily melodramatic ending. (Gramercy, 127 E. 23rd St. 777-4900.)

IN THE BLOOD—Suzan-Lori Parks's new play is based on "The Scarlet Letter." Directed by David Esbjornson. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200.)

JAMES JOYCE'S THE DEAD—A musical version of the short story. (11/8/99) (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 279-4200. Closes Nov. 28.)

THE JAZZ SINGER—The Jewish Repertory Theatre presents a new musical version of the Samson Raphaelson play. (Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 831-2000.)

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN—Ibsen's late drama, in a staging by the Pearl Theatre Company. (80 St. Marks Pl. 598-9802.)

KAT AND THE KINGS—A rock-and-roll musical set in Cape Town in 1957. (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

KEEP BANGIN'—"Stomp" showed that you can cook up an evening of theatre out of percussion alone, but this show proves it better. It's an unslick production—the point is the drumming alone. The ten-man cast is led by Jared Crawford, who, with his million-toothed smile, firestorm of dreads, and rare genius, lifts the whole thing into a kind of art heaven. (Players Theatre, 115 MacDougal St. 254-5076.)

KISS ME, KATE—Brian Stokes Mitchell and Marin Mazzie star in a revival of the Cole Porter musical, under the direction of Michael Blakemore. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

MAYBE BABY, IT'S YOU—Love in the big city, explained with many laughs by the show's accomplished writer-performers, Charlie Shanian and Shari Simpson. There's an undercurrent of sweetness and longing that makes the evening more than a series of skits—it's what you instinctively know at thirty but wish you'd learned at twenty. Directed with a sure, light touch by Jeremy Dobrish. (Soho Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 239-6200.)

MORNING, NOON AND NIGHT—A day in the life of the eccentric, obsessive monologuist Spalding Gray, removed from his natural habitat (New York City) and transplanted to an old house in Sag Harbor, where he lives in anxiety-tinged bliss with his girlfriend, stepdaughter, and two young sons. A haze of happiness hangs over the whole thing, which makes it seem a bit toothless, but Gray tells a good coming-of-age story, and his self-mocking exaggerations are actually endearing when turned on the domestic universe. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

THE PASSION OF FRIDA KAHLO—Priscilla López portrays the Mexican painter, in a renamed restaging of Doris Sendler's drama "Goodbye My Friduchita." (Arclight Theatre, 152 W. 71st St. 307-4100.)

THE PRICE—In Arthur Miller's 1968 play, a failed, dutiful brother, who thinks that life has given him a bad deal, cuts another bad deal, this time with a furniture dealer. But when his successful sibling turns up, the play becomes a negotiation about their family history, an agreement that can't be reached. As the rivalry is played out, the audience watches the riveting spectacle of a man clinging to a self-destructive illusion, despite all evidence to the contrary. As a metaphor for our culture of complaint, it ain't bad. And neither are the performances. "The Price" is not a waste of time, which is saying a lot on Broadway these days. (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

PUTTING IT TOGETHER—A revue celebrating the songs of Stephen Sondheim, starring Carol Burnett. Directed by Eric D. Schaeffer. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

THE RAINMAKER—Jayne Atkinson and Woody Harrelson star in the Roundabout Theatre Company's revival of Richard Nash's 1954 drama. Scott Ellis is the director. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 307-4100.)

SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER—The musical, based on the 1977 film. (Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

SHOWY LADY SLIPPER—Richard Maxwell's new show consists mostly of the gossipy conversation of three female friends awaiting a visit from the alpha-girl's boyfriend. The conversation is stunning in its banality, but, like a good pop song, it has surprising resonances, and Maxwell's distinctive style—actors as poker-faced conduits for dialogue, chunky staging, sobriety-test movement—is hilarious. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288. Closes Nov. 28.)

TANGO ARGENTINO—The dance revue, in a limited-engagement encore staging. (Gershwin, 51st St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

UNCLE JACK—The director and writer Jeff Cohen's contemporary adaptation of Chekhov's "Uncle Vanya." He manages, unlike some adaptors, to make an ever-fresh play seem newly accessible without raising the question "Why bother?" It's set on the expansive estate of a rural West Virginia family, and with the regrettable exception of Bernard K. Addison's scenery-chewing performance as the doctor, it's a sweet and rewarding experience. A charmer. (Tribeca Playhouse, 111 Reade St. 604-4195.)

THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES—Eve Ensler's one-woman show, which she first performed in New York three years ago Off-Off Broadway, is based on interviews she conducted with two hundred women about their vaginas: the body part itself, the word, and why "it never sounds like a word you want to say" no matter how many times you say it. There's a certain amount of shtick involved—Ensler asked women what their vaginas would wear if they got dressed, and she offers up a litany of nicknames for "down there"—but most of the stories she

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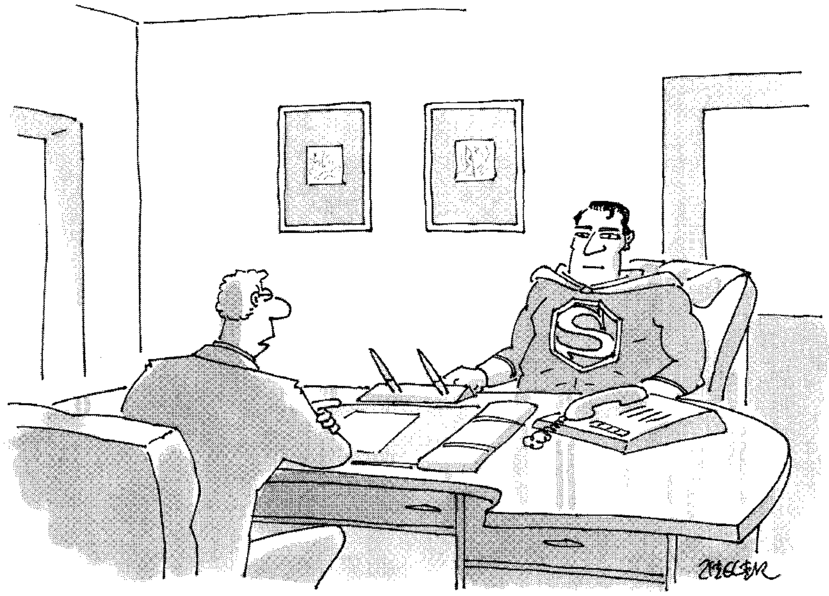

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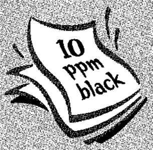

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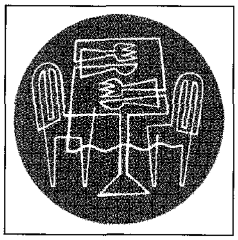
tells are touching and memorable. Often sadly so: Ensler makes you realize that when it comes to treating women and their bodies with real respect, the world still has miles to go. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.)

LONG RUNS

ANNIE GET YOUR GUN: Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100. . . . **BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES:** Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370. . . . **CABARET:** Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 239-6200. . . . **CATS:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200. . . . **CHICAGO:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **DE LA GUARDA:** Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E., at 15th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE FANTASTICKS:** Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838. . . . **FOOTLOOSE:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100. . . . **FORBIDDEN BROADWAY:** Stardust, Broadway at 51st St. 239-6200. . . . **FOSSE:** Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **HEDWIG AND THE ANGRY INCH:** Jane Street Theatre, Hotel Riverview Ballroom, 113 Jane St. 239-6200. . . . **I LOVE YOU, YOU'RE PERFECT, NOW CHANGE:** Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200. . . . **IT AIN'T NOTHIN' BUT THE BLUES:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 239-6200. . . . **JEKYLL & HYDE:** Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **LATE-NITE CATECHISM:** St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE LION KING:** New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 307-4100. . . . **LES MISÉRABLES:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **MISS SAIGON:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200. . . . **OVER THE RIVER AND THROUGH THE WOODS:** John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200. . . . **PERFECT CRIME:** Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401. . . . **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA:** Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **RAGTIME:** Ford Center for the Performing Arts, 213 W. 42nd St. 307-4100. . . . **RENT:** Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000. . . . **THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100. . . . **SECRETS EVERY SMART TRAVELER SHOULD KNOW:** Ibis, 327 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **SMOKEY JOE'S CAFÉ:** Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200. . . . **STOMP:** Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at St. Marks Pl. 477-2477. . . . **THINGS YOU SHOULDN'T SAY PAST MIDNIGHT:** Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 580-1313. . . . **TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING:** St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE WEIR:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200. (Closes Nov. 28.) . . . **WIT:** Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-4100.

TABLES FOR TWO



PALAČINKA, 24 Grand St. (625-0362)—Down where Chinatown doesn't quite meet SoHo and Tribeca, crêpes, of all things, are served, in a snug café whose name is Slavic for "little pancakes." Inside, the hissing of an Italian espresso machine can be heard over the music—something Moroccan, then Nina Simone. It's hard to tell which country Palačinka is meant to evoke, but, with its white plaster walls, tin ceiling, metal tables, bare wooden floors, white plates, and rubber-stoppered glass water bottles on each table, the place would be perfect for a romantic scene in a nineteen-forties movie. Tariq Haq, the chef, explains the fictional feel as simply "a reflection of what New York has to offer."

The cultural ambiguity tastes as good as it feels. Haq has concocted a delectable array of little pancakes. "Crêpes are a French thing," he says, "but the ingredients are not limited to traditional French recipes." A good thing; otherwise there would be no crêpe with spinach, garlic, lemon, and feta (Haq's favorite). And you'd never find yourself, on a crisp fall night, eating a crêpe filled with hearty Italian salami, roasted potato, mozzarella, and black-olive tapenade. Although served with sides of mixed greens, these dinner crêpes do not a dinner make—a hungry couple should also split one of the dinner salads, the most creative being the Ploughman's, which combines ham, roasted potatoes, Gruyère, chutney, and tomatoes. The sandwiches, clones of the crêpes but served on mouth-scraping toasted ciabatta, are best ignored.

On a really cold night, even those who've dined elsewhere will be enticed by the strong coffees and the dessert crêpes, which come with baked apple, brandied pear with almond-crème sauce, and an extraordinary crème du marron (chestnut paste with crème fraîche). In keeping with the Old World atmosphere, smoking is allowed, and Haq expects a liquor license by the end of the year. Through the wooden blinds of the huge front windows, the lighted World Trade Center and the glowing crescent on the Moondance Diner make for one of the most intoxicating views in the city. (Open daily for lunch and dinner. Entrées $7 to $10.)

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET—After its opening-night gala (Nov. 23 at 7:15), the company returns to the business of inspiring little girls in pigtails to dream of a life *en pointe.* The annual "Nutcracker" enchantment begins the day after Thanksgiving. (New York State Theatre. 870-5570. Nov. 26 at 8, Nov. 27 at 2 and 8, Nov. 28 at 1 and 5, and Nov. 30 at 6.)

"SUZANNE FARRELL STAGES THE MASTERS OF 20TH CENTURY BALLET"—From 1961 to 1989, it was always the other way around. Now, the prima ballerina returns the favor, with two programs of works by Robbins, Béjart, and Balanchine, including "Meditation," a duet from 1963 whose female role had previously been performed only by Farrell. (New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 239-6200. Nov. 24 and Nov. 26-27 at 2 and 7 and Nov. 28 at 3.)

JAZZ TAP ENSEMBLE—The twenty-first-anniversary season for the five-member troupe, who both improvise (with a jazz trio) and perform choreographed works, by Eddie Brown, Jimmy Slyde, and Gregory Hines. The tap is exceptional—it's worth the trip to catch the light-footed Roxane (Samedini) Butterfly, who, in a stylistic throwback to the Nicholas Brothers' era, pulls off her speedy combinations with unabashed and unruffled showmanship. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Nov. 23-24 at 8, Nov. 26-27 at 2 and 8, and Nov. 28 at 2 and 7:30.)

"FRESH TRACKS"—The semiannual showcase for emerging choreographers features Karen Bernard, Gerald Casel, Amy Cox, Kristi Spessard, Nancy Turano, and Jon Zimmerman. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 924-0077. Nov. 26-27 at 8 and Nov. 28 at 3.)

MARY ANTHONY DANCE THEATRE—The troupe marks its forty-third anniversary with works by Anthony and young choreographers Kun-Yang Lin and Mary Ford, as well as a tongue-in-cheek rendition of "Nature Dancing," by Bertram Ross (following a script by a contemporary of Isadora Duncan), which demonstrates proper technique for the primal emotions: fear, pain, joy, grief. (Theatre of the Riverside Church, W. 120th St. at Riverside Dr. 674-8191. Nov. 27 at 3 and 8 and Nov. 28 at 2.)

"A GIRL JOAN"—Erica Stuart reprises her evening-length solo in the role of Joan of Arc. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 647-0202. Nov. 24 at 8.)

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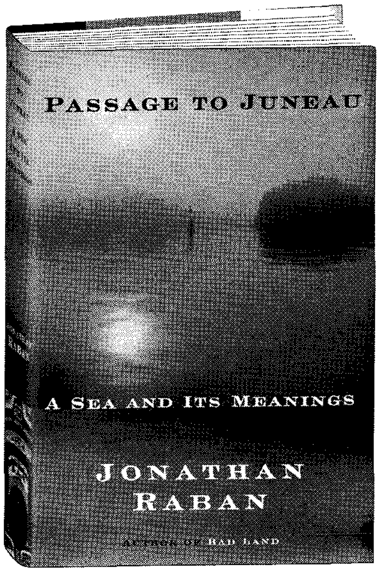

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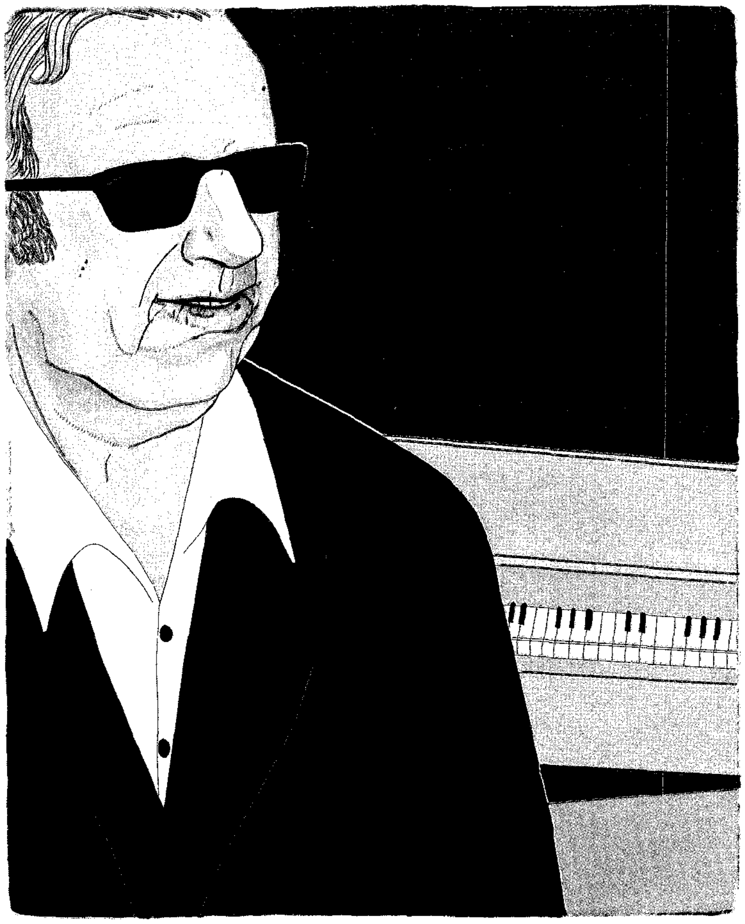
NIGHT LIFE



George Shearing celebrates his eightieth birthday, at Carnegie Hall.

LARA TOMLIN

CONCERTS

EVERYTHING BUT THE GIRL—The stylish Brit duo of Ben Watt and Tracey Thorn enjoyed a creative peak three years ago with their album "Walking Wounded," which introduced the hyperactive chitter-chattering disco music called drum-and-bass (a.k.a. jungle) to pop, with palatable results; a year later, Watt's riveting book, "Patient: The True Story of a Rare Illness," chronicled the songwriter's gruelling recovery from an obscure bowel disease that left him near death and about fifty pounds lighter (he'd fallen ill while recording "Wounded"). The band's latest release, "Temperamental" is a less urgent affair, but EBTG continues in its role as England's preeminent arbiter of tasteful club music. (Hammerstein Ballroom, Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. 564-4882. Nov. 24 at 8.)

CHICAGO—The seventies supergroup. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 496-7070. Nov. 24 at 8.)

MICHAEL HASHIM—The flavorful and underrated saxophonist Hashim brings a strong historical sense and a flesh-and-blood urgency to pre-bop idioms and more modern material. (Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St. 708-9480. Nov. 26 at 5:30.)

FILTER—An industrial-rock band sprung from the ranks of Nine Inch Nails, best known for the exquisitely attitudinal single "Hey, Man, Nice Shot." (Hammerstein Ballroom. Nov. 26 at 7:30.)

NATALIE COLE—Nat's daughter, whose latest is an album of Christmas songs with the London Symphony Orchestra. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. Nov. 26 at 8.)

GUSTER—This unique pop trio (two guitarists and a conga player) from Boston is searching for the road that leads to becoming the next decade's Dave Matthews Band. An incessant touring schedule, a fervent fan base, and the magic of the Internet resulted in two hot-selling independent releases, which in turn earned the group a major-label début, "Lost and Gone Forever," produced by Steve Lillywhite, who polished Matthews's first two albums. (Hammerstein Ballroom. Nov. 27 at 8.)

"RAINFOREST ALLIANCE BENEFIT"—An eclectic bunch, including blues-guitar hero Robert Cray, Levon Helm, legendary singer turned actor from The Band, Beninese pop diva Angelique Kidjo, the absurdly gifted singer-songwriter Shawn Colvin, and the congenitally sensitive James Taylor, join together to save the earth. (Beacon Theatre. Nov. 29 at 8.)

"GEORGE SHEARING'S 80TH!"—If pianist George Shearing ever played an inelegant note in his five-decade jazz career, no one seems to remember it. One of those deliciously elusive players who can't be accurately linked to any particular style, Shearing uses bop, swing, classical, and Latin piano phrases to design densely melodic solos. If the fire of improvisation doesn't truly ignite, the warmth of his gracious and witty playing is always felt. Sadly, Mel Tormé, Shearing's great friend and collaborator, missed the chance to celebrate the pianist's eightieth birthday, but a host of other musicians will be on hand, including Nancy Wilson, Dave Brubeck, Billy Taylor, Regina Carter, the John Pizzarelli trio, Tito Puente, and Shearing's own quintet. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Nov. 30 at 8.)

CLUBS

(Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.)

BOTTOM LINE, 15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—Nov. 28: Blistering blues from the original roots rocker, **JOHNNY WINTER.**

BOWERY BALLROOM, 6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—Nov. 28: **MARC ALMOND,** the wispy former singer of the eighties synth-pop combo Soft Cell, looks at tainted love from the androgynous side of the street.

THE COOLER, 416 W. 14th St. (229-0785)—Nov. 27: Hip-hop may have made the cover of *Time*, but a better measure of the genre's reach is **DJ VADIM,** a Russian-born producer, who's been working in England since 1994. Vadim incorporates creaking doors, trickling water, and other found sounds into his soundscapes, making listening a highly textured experience. For this engagement, Vadim and guests—including **MR. THING** (one-third of the award-winning turntablist crew the Scratch Perverts), rapper **BLU RUM 13,** and human-beat-box specialist **KILLER KELA**—man the turntables in a re-creation of his boundary-stretching new album, "U.S.S.R.: Life from the Other Side."

FEZ, 380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—Nov. 24: If you can't get your hands on any Calgon, reach for the latest solo release by **MÁIRE BRENNAN,** the lead singer of the Celtic group Clannad (and older sister of Enya). "Whisper to the Wild Water" is as relaxing as a hot bath. Nov. 26-27: **MOMUS.** He lists Rabelais and Martial among his songwriting influences (with a side of Matthew Barney and Kubrick's "A Clockwork Orange"), and his music—from Brecht to Beck, on Moog and simulated harpsichord—is suitably challenging. But live, draped on a chair and sporting a pirate eye-patch, his obscurities coalesce and his sharp wit and smooth rap seduce. His songs, by the way, can be quite dirty, as might be expected of someone who also goes in for the Decameron. With Japanese superstar **KAHIMI KARIE,** who sleepily whispers sixties-style pop confections in French and Italian—except when she wakes up, straps on a pair of fur ears, and prowls the stage singing her hit, "I Am a Kitten." Nov. 30: **FOUNTAINS OF WAYNE.** "Utopia Parkway," the second album by this talented pop quartet, led by songwriters Adam Schlesinger and Chris Collingwood, is every bit as bright, funny, and addictive as their fantastic 1996 self-titled début. The themes are the same: unrequited love, suburban ennui, teen covetousness. But the nova luminosity of the first disk has dimmed a bit in favor of slightly more complex arrangements and more adventurous melodies. The **MINGUS BIG BAND** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

IRVING PLAZA, 17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—Nov. 26: Springsteen cronies **SOUTHSIDE JOHNNY AND THE ASBURY JUKES** throw a party. Nov. 29-30: **LUNA.** Led by Harvard grad Dean Wareham, who drove Galaxie 500 to college-rock greatness, this New York quartet makes a dreamy kind of music so frankly derivative that it's both disposable and eternal. Last year, though, after four albums, Elektra found the band disposable and dropped it. They have since signed with the indie label Jericho, and their latest album is "The Days of Our Nights." . . . ¶ The Swing Dance Society gathers here every Sunday, with sets from eight until midnight. For information on the society, call 696-9737.

KNITTING FACTORY, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Nov. 23-24: Milwaukee's **THE PROMISE RING** turns out a style of music called, variously, emo-core, emo-rock, and just plain emo, which is short for "emotion." Their sound is located between the wrath of punk and the sap of pop. It's carefully crafted, earnest, and surprisingly articulate. With **BURNING AIRLINES,** a band comprised of former members of the indie-punk outfit Jawbox, including guitarist J. Robbins (who produced the Promise Ring's latest album, "Very Emergency"). Nov. 26: **MARK RIBOT Y LOS CUBANOS POSTIZOS.** Appropriating the arrangements of Arsenio Rodriguez and other pre-Castro bandleaders, Ribot's "prosthetic" Cubans are a post-modern, post-Cold War pleasure. Nov. 26-28: **ELLIOTT SHARP'S TERRAPLANE.** Sharp, who's usually heard producing unearthly sounds on a Frankensteinian instrument from which coat hangers and other metallic objects protrude, also happens to be a monster blues guitarist; Terraplane is his rootsy trio. Nov. 28: Led by femme-fatale vocalist Jennifer Charles, a brooding beauty who looks like a cross between Juliette Lewis and Morticia Addams, the downtown combo **ELYSIAN FIELDS** plays what might best be described as erotic jazz.

MAXWELL'S, 1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-798-0406)—Born in Kansas and raised in Hoboken, **FREEDY JOHNSTON** (Nov. 26-27) has a knack for churning out exacting folk-rock with a convincing Midwestern twang; his songs bristle with careful detail and piercing language.

Mercury Lounge, 217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—Nov. 26: The minimalist composer and producer **NOBUKAZU TAKEMURA** combines static, repeated tones, and silence into music that challenges the mind and the soul with a grace reminiscent of the work of Steve Reich. Also on Nov. 26: **BROKEBACK,** a successful atmospheric exploration of the melodic capabilities of the Fender six-string bass, led by Tortoise bassist Douglas McCombs. Nov. 29: Glasgow's **IDLEWILD** offers a night of ear-cleaning revival punk. Nov. 30: Led by Carol Lipnik, a singer with a five-octave range, **SPOOKARAMA** creates original music rooted in the carny atmosphere of Lipnik's home, Coney Island.

Supper Club, 240 W. 47th St. (921-1940)—Like the high-waisted old suits the kids wear to dance the Lindy, the retro-swing movement has proven to be a durable garment. Los Angeles's **BIG BAD VOODOO DADDY** (Nov. 24) was one of the first bands on the scene, in the early nineties, and their latest release, "This Beautiful Life," shows they're still in fine form.

Wetlands, 161 Hudson St. (966-4225)—Nov. 26: **STRANGEFOLK,** the other neo-hippie band out of Burlington, Vermont, whose jam-based shows are often compared to those of Phish. With the **JAZZ MANDOLIN PROJECT,** a trio led by onetime Preservation Hall Jazz Band member Jamie Masefield. Nov. 27: The **JAZZ MANDOLIN PROJECT** and **JAZZ IS DEAD.** At their best, the Grateful Dead approached the improvisational fluency of a fine jazz ensemble, so it's only natural that jazz-leaning fusioneers would have something to say about the Dead's music. The players include former Weather Report bassist Alphonso Johnson, Mahavishnu Orchestra drummer Billy Cobham, Dixie Dregs keyboardist T Lavitz, and Jimmy Herring, the guitarist for Bruce Hampton's Aquarium Rescue Unit. Nov. 30: **JOE GALLANT AND ILLUMINATI,** a seventeen-piece ensemble whose latest effort is a reworking of the Grateful Dead's 1977 album "Terrapin Station."

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Algonquin Hotel, 59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—Vocalist **ANDREA MARCOVICCI** is currently at work in the woody nook known as the Oak Room. Dining.

Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through Nov. 28: The **MC COY TYNER** trio. Had pianist Tyner retired after leaving John Coltrane's group in 1965, he'd still be remembered as one of the most brilliant and individualistic players of an era that prized iconoclasts. He didn't, thankfully, and these days he still exhibits his Tatum-meets-Trane maneuverings with terrific panache. . . . **NOTE:** On Nov. 24 saxophonist **CHICO FREEMAN,** a gritty stylist who still has enough Coltrane in his sound to conjure up pleasant visions of the great one, joins Tyner as the club celebrates its eighteenth anniversary. Dining.

Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound pastel murals, and, through Dec. 31, **BOBBY SHORT.** . . . ¶ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, **BARBARA CARROLL** is in attendance.

Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St. (576-2232)—Nov. 23-24: Pianist **BILL CHARLAP** is one of several gifted, thoughtful New York players who are infatuated with lyricism. He may not be the flavor du jour, but his elegance and discernment have a cleansing effect. He's got the great nonsibling **WASHINGTONS**—bassist **PETER** and drummer **KENNY**—as a driving rhythm section. Nov. 26-28: **RALPH PETERSON'S FO'TET** is driven by the leader's aggressive, in-your-face drumming. Dining.

Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Nov. 30: The **CHARLES GAYLE** trio. Saxophonist Gayle defends his neo-expressionist turf, eschewing chord changes and polite tonalities for raw and focussed emotion. Brave music for brave listeners.

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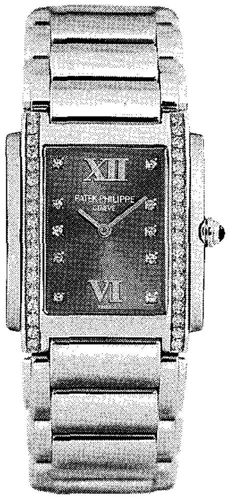

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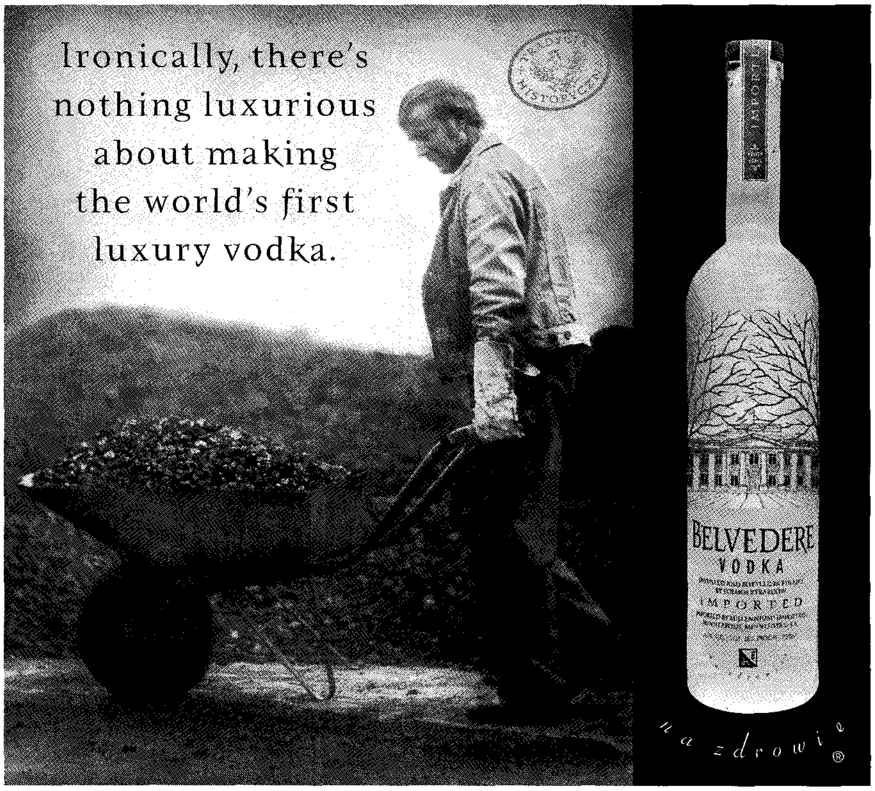
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Red Blazer, 32 W. 37th St. (947-6428)—**Stan Rubin's Big Band,** featuring vocalist **Cary Hoffman,** holds court on Thursdays with a program of songs made famous by Frank Sinatra.

Sweet Basil, 88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (242-1785)—There's an almost sensual pleasure in watching great drummers like **Victor Lewis** (here through Nov. 28); every move is smooth, perfectly balanced, and seemingly effortless. For the sublime lift he brings to the bandstand, Lewis's bandmates should pay *him*. Dining.

Up Over Jazz Cafe, 351 Flatbush Ave., at Seventh Ave., Brooklyn (718-398-5413)—*Nov. 26-27:* Pianist **Harry Whitaker** may be most familiar as a name on R. & B./fusion recordings, but he also has a way with neobop, as this gig with trumpeter **Joe Magnarelli** should prove.

Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through Nov. 28: Despite what the grandiose titles of his recordings would have you believe, pianist **Brad Mehldau** isn't Bill Evans reincarnated, but he is an assured, introspective stylist who has developed a lovely give-and-take with his rhythm-mates **Jorge Rossy** (drums) and **Larry Grenadier** (bass). The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

Zinc Bar, 90 W. Houston St. (477-8337)—On his recent album of unaccompanied guitar, "Solotude," **Ron Affif,** who has a regular Monday gig at this intimate space, displayed a controlled and pleasantly muted side to his normally extroverted personality—a good sign for this gifted player whose speed sometimes gets the best of him. Saturdays and Sundays feature Brazilian jazz.

ART

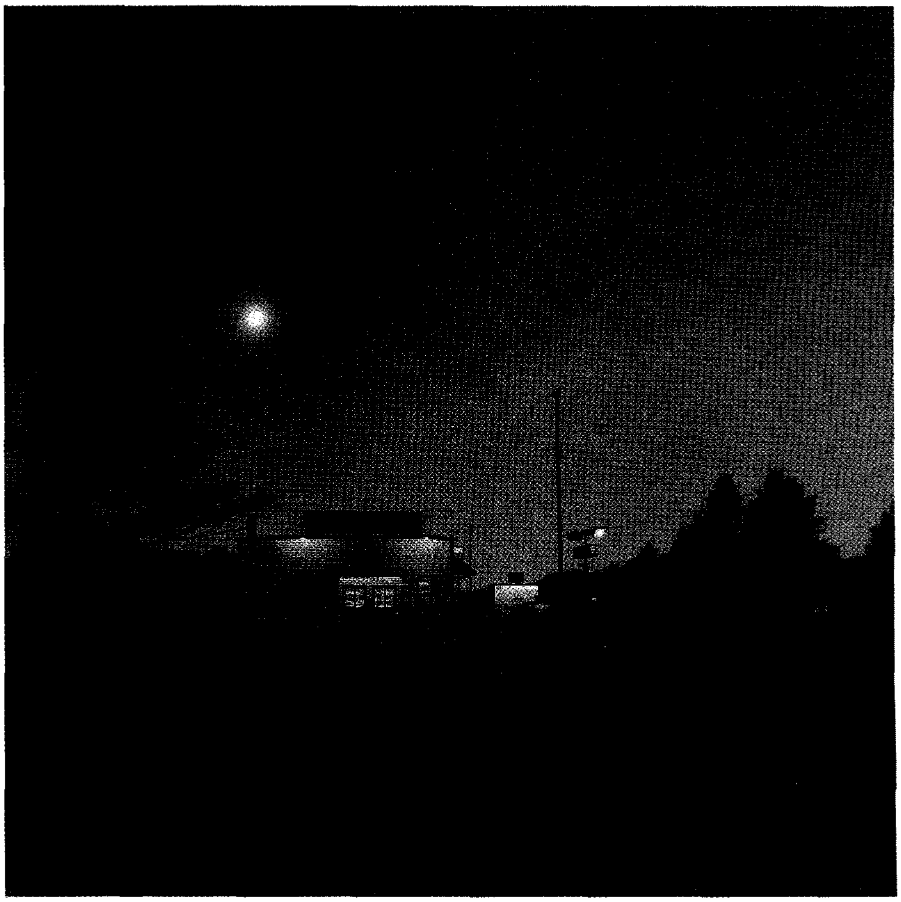
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—"Only the Best: Masterpieces of the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon" is home to eighty works, including paintings by Rubens, Fragonard, Turner, and Manet, while their permanent residence undergoes renovation. Through Feb. 27. . . . ¶ "Portraits by Ingres: Image of an Epoch" offers forty paintings and ninety-two drawings of the nineteenth-century French élite. Through Jan. 2. . . . ¶ "Carleton Watkins: The Art of Perception" presents more than a hundred and twenty-five images by this pioneer of photography, who recorded the vastness of the American West. Through Jan. 9. . . . ¶ "Egyptian Art in the Age of the Pyramids," a sombre and ravishing survey of five hundred years of the millennia of Egyptian dynasties, covers the Old Kingdom (2650-2150 B.C.), the glorious formative period of Pharaonic art when the great pyramids were built and religious statuary rose to a refined naturalism. Through Jan. 9. . . . ¶ "Daido Moriyama: Hunter," an exhibition of forty photographs made in postwar Japan. Through Jan. 2. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—MOMA ushers in the new millennium with a seventeen-month-long series of shows, all culled from the museum's permanent collection. "Modern Starts," the first of three installments, celebrates the advent of modernism and is itself divided into three sections. "People," with six sections of its own, opens the onslaught, and "Places" and "Things" follow; the entire extravaganza makes the Ring Cycle seem like a miniseries. "People" runs through Feb. 1; "Places" and "Things" through March 14. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 5:45; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:15.)

Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—A retrospective devoted to the Neapolitan painter Francesco Clemente presents more than two hundred paintings, frescoes, watercolors, pastels, sculptures, illustrations, and collaborative works. Through Jan. 9. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

Whitney Museum of American Art, Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—Part two of "The American Century" is a vast improvement over its predecessor, and not just because American art gathered momentum after the Second World War. The exhibition design as a whole is clearer: film clips and "historical" displays have been segregated to small side rooms, so they don't compete directly with the nearly seven hundred art works. Through Feb. 13. (Open Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)



"July Moon," by Linden Frederick, at MB Modern.

American Museum of Natural History, Central Park W. at 79th St. (769-5100)—"Body Art: Marks of Identity" reviews the corporeal beautification practices of many cultures, from foot binding and skull reshaping to tattooing and piercing. The tools (lip plugs, ear spools, inking needles) appear alongside photographs and films illustrating ancient and contemporary techniques. Through May 29. . . . ¶ The museum's vivarium again fills with hundreds of lepidoptera who have everything they need—warmth, nectar, tour groups—to survive in the butterfly conservatory. Through Feb. 27. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

Brooklyn Museum of Art, Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—"Eastman Johnson: Painting America." Through Feb. 6. . . . ¶ "Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection." Through Jan. 9. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

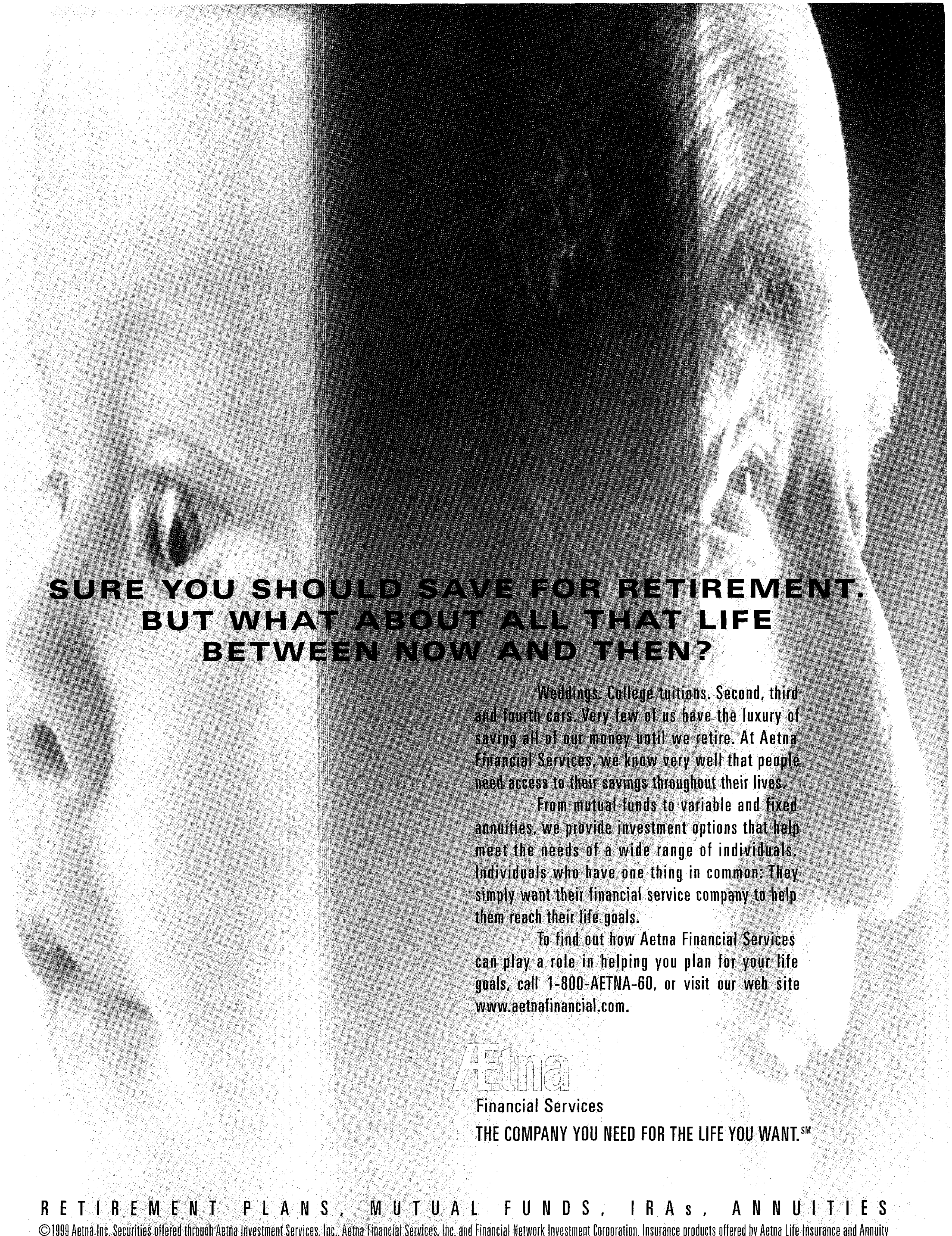
New York Public Library, Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. (869-8089)—"Seeing Is Believing" is a lavish, eclectic exhibition of scientific and medical illustrations, ranging from the Middle Ages to the early twentieth century. Among the most spectacular works are Robert Hooke's "Micrographia" (the first book devoted to microscopic observations), open to a centerfold of a gigantic flea, and Andreas Vesalius's great anatomy textbook, "De Humani Corporis Fabrica," with its heroic flayed-muscle figures, believed to have been drawn by the studio of Titian. Much of what's on view is deliciously gruesome, elaborate, or fanciful. After a sequence of fantastical medieval cosmologies, Copernicus's heliocentric version seems disappointingly staid. Through Feb. 19. . . . ¶ "In Company: Robert Creeley's Collaborations" displays evidence of the Black Mountain poet's ceaseless joint efforts: with Francesco Clemente, Jim Dine, Donald Sultan, Alex Katz, John Chamberlain, Susan Rothenberg, Joe Brainard, R. B. Kitaj, Sol LeWitt, Robert Indiana, and Georg Baselitz, to name just the artists. Through Jan. 13. (Open Mondays, and Thursdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6; Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 11 to 7:30.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

(Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.)

David Bates—Still-lifes executed with an agreeably ham-handed vigor. Blunt might be this Texan's middle name: in the paintings, he outlines forms with a Magic Marker-like contour. In the wall reliefs and sculptures, every leaf or petal is a half-inch thick. If this emphatic habit makes his debts to Marsden Hartley and Picasso all too obvious, his works nevertheless feel reckless and fresh. Crowded with clunky sawtooth forms and high-voltage color, Bates's sunflowers, magnolias, and oleanders seem to be bursting out of their vases, eager to broadcast an old-fashioned modernist excitement. Through Dec. 4. (DC Moore, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 247-2111.)

James Brooks (1906-92)—Best known for his 1942 cyclorama, "The History of Flight," one of the few W.P.A. murals still on view at its original location (the Marine Air Ter-



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minal at La Guardia), Brooks remains one of the most intriguing and least celebrated members of the New York School. This small show catches him during a crucial formative period, 1949-51, when he was in the process of absorbing a decisive new influence—that of his friend Jackson Pollock. With their wriggling glyphs and lassos of spattered color, these works are clearly homages, but they have a shaped, edited elegance that Pollock seldom permitted himself. Through Dec. 23. (Washburn, 20 W. 57th St. 397-6780.)

Michael Chapman—Paintings by an artist who seems to have fed his imagination on an all-Hopper diet. In most of the images, businessmen stroll along nearly deserted, sun-drenched pavements. Streets are lined with gleaming, chubby forties-era cars. Several interior scenes include versions of actual Hopper paintings, along with miniature trains that belch black smoke. Filtered through a California childhood, Chapman's Hopperist imaginings are beautifully executed, though their neat, toylike Surrealism veers precariously close to illustration. Through Dec. 1. (Tatistcheff, 50 W. 57th St. 664-0907.)

Linden Frederick—These canvases train the eye for the moody tricks of color at dusk. Big skies dwarf unpeopled landscapes that nevertheless hum with fond detail: the lights of a town almost hidden on the horizon, the lime reflection of a laundromat in a parking-lot puddle, the gradations of shadow on a rutted gravel road. There are painterly precedents for scenes of such vital loneliness, but the literary echoes are stronger—Steinbeck, McCullers, or Richard Ford. Through Nov. 27. (MB Modern, 41 E. 57th St. 371-3444.)

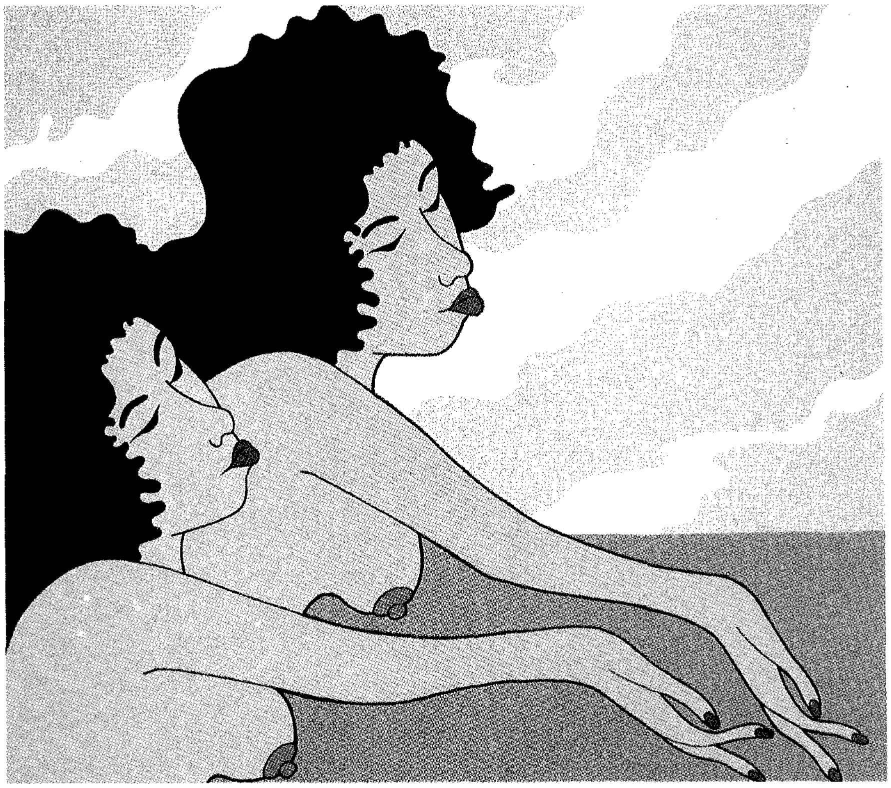
Short List—**ERWIN BLUMENFELD,** Ubu, 16 E. 78th St. 794-4444. Through Dec. 23. . . . **NAUM GABO,** Pace Wildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 421-3292. Through Dec. 11. . . . **KAREN GIUSTI,** Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. 414-8511. Through Dec. 22 (See also Chelsea Short List). . . . **DAMIEN HIRST,** Magidson, 41 E. 78th St. 288-0666. Through Nov. 27. . . . **WLODZIMIERZ KSIAZEK,** Kouros, 23 E. 73rd St. 288-5888. Through Dec. 23. . . . **LESLIE LERNER,** Littlejohn, 41 E. 57th St. 980-2323. Through Dec. 18. . . . **CILDO MEIRELES,** Galerie Lelong, 20 W. 57th St. 315-0470. Through Jan. 15. . . . **LARRY RIVERS,** Marlborough, 40 W. 57th St. 541-4900. Open Mondays; through Dec. 4. . . . **GIULIO ROMANO,** Leubsdorf Gallery, Hunter College, Lexington Ave. at 68th St. 772-4991. Open daily, except Sundays, 1 to 6; through Nov. 27. . . . **REEVE SCHLEY,** Graham, 1014 Madison Ave., at 78th St. 535-5767. Through Dec. 23. . . . **RICHARD SERRA,** Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 744-2313. Through Jan. 14. . . . **SAUL STEINBERG,** Baumgold, 128 E. 72nd St. 861-7338. Through Dec. 18. . . . **ED WEINBERGER AND SCOTT SCHMIDT,** Friedman, 32 E. 67th St. 794-8950. Through Jan. 8. . . . **MICHELE ZALOPANY,** Associated American Artists, 20 W. 57th St. 399-5510. Through Dec. 4.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Marco Brambilla—"Approach," an exceptionally fine video installation filmed at Kennedy Airport. Across four monitors, we watch a sequence of sleepy and dishevelled figures walk from customs to the arrivals hall. The camera zooms in just as each traveller, recognizing friends or relatives on our side of the camera, responds with stirrings of relief and pleasure—they've stepped from anonymity to intimacy. Through Nov. 27. (Henry Urbach Architecture, 526 W. 26th St. 627-0974.)

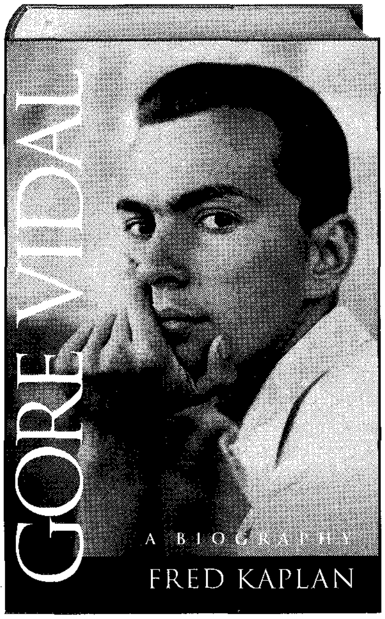
John Currin—New paintings of women by this wry hipster/reactionary, certainly the most perverse and gifted artist of his generation. In the show's flagship painting, a dazzling strawberry blonde stands before a milk-white background, smiling as polychromatic butterflies—evidently as smitten as we are—flutter around her. It's an ode to Beauty, of course, but also a testament to the male heterosexual's secretly feminine heart. Through Dec. 4. (Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 627-6000.)

Jacqueline Humphries—The horizontal stroke introduced in the artist's last show is back, in black. She has abandoned multiple marks in favor of a single whoosh of oil-slick obsidian between white margins. Two of the paintings, "Black Ball" and "Black Beauty," stick to this palette; the rest add blood red, chalk-line blue, Easter-chick yellow or



"Pacific," by John Wesley, at Fredericks.

"Style is knowing who you are, what you want to say, and not giving a damn."
–Gore Vidal



For the better part of a century Gore Vidal has been both participant and provocateur at the centers of American power, moving easily through the disparate worlds of literature, drama, film, politics, and historical debate. Yet an accurate picture of this multifaceted chameleon has eluded us—until now.

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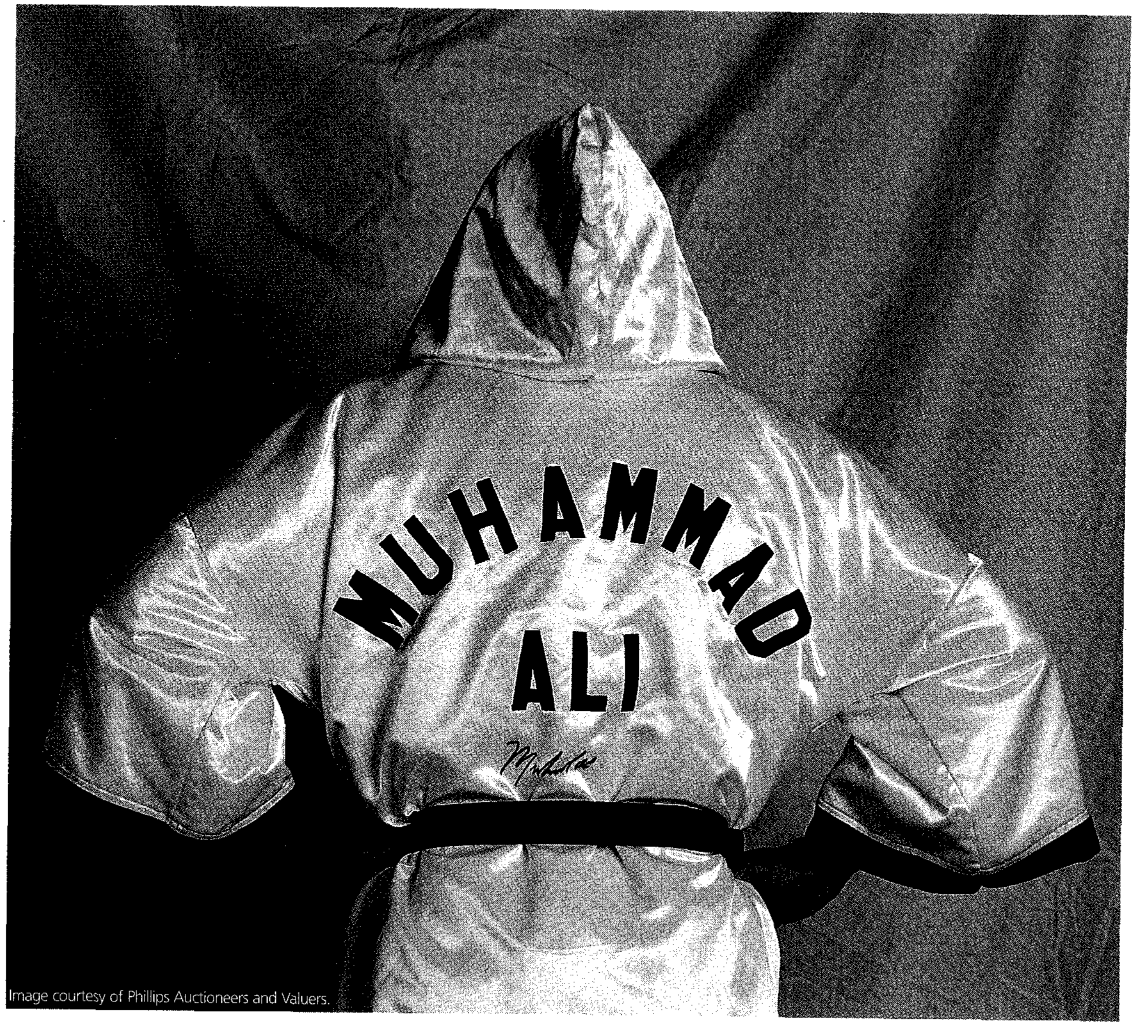

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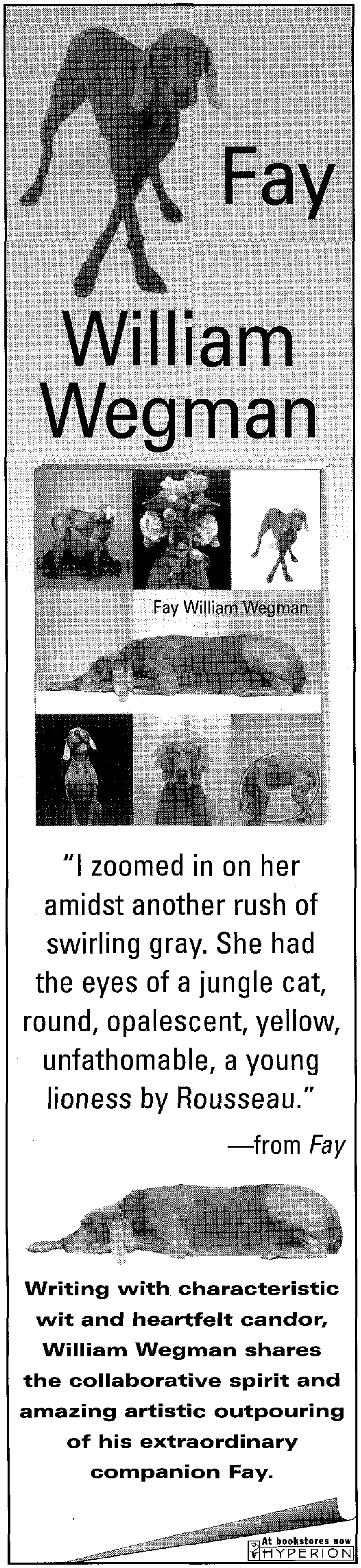
Fay William Wegman

Fay William Wegman

"I zoomed in on her amidst another rush of swirling gray. She had the eyes of a jungle cat, round, opalescent, yellow, unfathomable, a young lioness by Rousseau."

—from *Fay*

Writing with characteristic wit and heartfelt candor, William Wegman shares the collaborative spirit and amazing artistic outpouring of his extraordinary companion Fay.

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HYPERION

plastic-doll pink. There's nothing really new in Humphries' marriage of Minimalism and Abstract Expressionism, but she paints with a seductive confidence that pulls you in. Through Nov. 27. (Greene Naftali, 526 W. 26th St. 463-7770.)

Sherrie Levine and Joost van Oss—The artists' collaboration is based on a chair and a table designed by the De Stijl architect Gerrit Rietveld in 1923. The pairing of Levine's Conceptual appropriations with van Oss's Minimalist repetition creates an austere and elegant installation. Two untitled sculptures, each comprising twenty-four identical rolled-steel pieces, sit side by side—one is a phalanx of chairs, the other of tables. The transformation of utilitarian designs into a museum-scale art work accompanied by a "Do not touch" sign is something of an irony, but this is precisely Levine's strategy: to tip the masters off balance. Perhaps the last word is Reitveld's: the equilibrium so integral to his vision shines through in this handsome show. Through Dec. 4. (Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 255-1105.)

Lari Pittman—This L.A. artist is painting's pack rat, filling every last inch of his surfaces with imagery and ornamentation. Griffins and danger signs vie with hand bones and hipbones; generic teen idols mingle with oil tankers and cruets labelled "merlot" or "semen." Pittman is after simultaneity, not overload, and the compositions succeed like a well-run three-ring circus: you don't know where to look first, but it doesn't matter. Through Dec. 23. (Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 206-9300.)

John Wesley—"Irish Paintings." New works by a highly original artist whose pared-down technique—flat figures, outlined in black and painted in a matte palette dominated by *confectionery pinks and blues—hasn't* wavered in thirty-six years. The style is a cross between the Sunday funnies—Dagwood Bumstead is a frequent subject—and ukiyo-e woodcuts (the Japanese term translates as "floating world," which could serve as the title of his entire œuvre). The eight canvases installed here, which the New York-based artist painted in Ireland over the past year, range from "Pacific," featuring a pair of petulant Asian women, their pink flesh punctuated by red lips, nails, and nipples, to "Wow! Whoops! Oh Boy!," in which a goofy bird flails in midair above a Hokusai wave. They're baffling delights. Through Dec. 4. (Fredericks, 504 W. 22nd St. 633-6555.)

Rachel Whiteread—An elegiac show of nine identical pairs of sculptures, cast from mortuary slabs. Though made of bronze, the gleaming surfaces mimic the original porcelain. The complementary convex-concave pairs make for a soulful comment on Minimalism. The casting process itself serves as an inverted metaphor for death: absence made presence. There's a creepy, antiseptic silence to the room which fits the subject. But it also lends a kinky aura, as if a dominatrix in patent leather and a nurse's cap might sweep in at any moment. Through Dec. 18. (Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 206-9100.)

Short List—**GÜNTER BRUS** and **HERMANN NITSCH**, White Box, 601 W. 26th St. 727-0767. Both shows through Jan. 22. . . . **RICHMOND BURTON**, Cheim & Read, 521 W. 23rd St. 242-7727. Through Jan. 1. . . . **CARROLL DUNHAM**, Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St. 206-7100. Through Dec. 4. . . . **TONY FEHER**, D'Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St. 352-9460. Through Dec. 23. . . . **KAREN GIUSTI**, Nikolai, 505 W. 22nd St. 414-8511. Through Dec. 13. . . . **MONA HATOUM**, Alexander and Bonin, 132 Tenth Ave., at 18th St. 367-7474. Through Dec. 4. . . . **MARTIN HONERT**, Marks, 523 W. 24th St. 243-0200. Through Dec. 24. . . . **YAYOI KUSAMA**, Robert Miller Temporary, 508 W. 26th St. 366-4774. Through Dec. 17. . . . **NINA LEVY**, I-20, 529 W. 20th St. 645-1100. Through March 31. . . . **PAM LINS**, Ten in One, 526 W. 26th St. 604-9660. Through Dec. 18. . . . **MARIA MARSHALL**, Team, 527 W. 26th St. 279-9219. Through Dec. 23. . . . **STEPHEN MURPHY**, 303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 255-1121. Through Dec. 23. . . . **DAVID REED**, Protetch, 511 W. 22nd St. 633-6999. Through Nov. 27. . . . **RICHARD SERRA**, Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 228-2828. Through Feb. 26. . . . **PAT STEIR**, Marlborough, 211 W. 19th St. 463-8634. Through Jan. 1.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Gordon Matta-Clark (1943-78)—Best known for having turned derelict buildings into temporary sculptures by cutting or splitting them, Matta-Clark is usually thought of as a sort of renegade architect. The work here, however, casts him in a slightly different light. Beginning with the aptly titled "Garbage Wall," and continuing with a briefcase full of broken glass, a portion of a graffiti-covered van, and various photographs of picturesque refuse, this exhibition suggests that Mattta-Clark was a lover, even perhaps a celebrator, of urban decay. If Giuliani wanted to raise interesting objections to an art exhibition, this would be a good pick. Through Dec. 24. (Zwirner, 43 Greene St. 966-9074.)

Kiki Smith—Anyone who's seen "Tale," the visceral—not to mention excremental—sculpture now on view at the Whitney, may be relieved to learn that Smith's latest show features tales of a different kind. "Red Riding Hood" provides the inspiration for "Of Her Nature," a sprawling installation of leaded-glass panels, sculptures, and prints.

CLASSICAL NOTES

Orchestral Orgy—Listeners who appreciate the lure of "golden age" symphonic recordings are living in a sort of golden age themselves, as technological wizardry brings great performances of the past up to currently acceptable acoustical standards. Not every track in **THE PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA: THE CENTENNIAL COLLECTION** sounds as if it were recorded yesterday, but even the crackly selections contain music-making so exciting as to overshadow any sonic shortcomings. Drawn from broadcast, archival, and commercial tapes made between 1917 and 1998, these twelve disks chart the history of the "Philadelphia sound," distinctive for its plush string timbre and exuberant intensity. Only four music directors have overseen the ensemble since it made its first recordings, and each is represented by characteristic efforts: Stokowski (the visionary), Ormandy (the sound-melder), *Muti (the dramatist), and Sawallisch (the* Kapellmeister). The set includes several rarities, including Heifetz joining Stokowski for a never-released reading of Sibelius's Violin Concerto (1934), in addition to such magnificent moments as Klaus Tennstedt getting to the heart of Barber's Adagio (1985) and Sviatoslav Richter playing Mozart's G-Major Piano Concerto with captivating wisdom (1970). (It's available for $200 by calling 800-457-8354, or through www.philorch.org.)

Those who want to see, as well as hear, another great orchestra in decades-old action should not miss **CHICAGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA: HISTORIC TELECASTS**, a new video series from VAI (69601-06). Each of the six volumes contains a complete forty-five-to-fifty-six-minute broadcast from the nineteen-fifties or early sixties. The first, a mostly Beethoven program conducted by the raptorlike Fritz Reiner (then the orchestra's music director), demonstrates how the group's powerful sound was rooted in severe discipline. Other volumes show that the orchestra could achieve variety, too, as Stokowski, Monteux, Szell, Munch, and Hindemith work their distinctive magic on the tried-and-true. Berlioz's "Roman Carnival Overture" sounds strikingly different under the batons of Szell (taut) and Monteux (seductive), and Hindemith's interpretation of his own "Concert Music for Brass and Strings," spotlighting Chicago's celebrated brass section, is one for the ages.

Fairy-tale enchantment is nicely suited to Smith's spiritual concerns, and the best works here, such as "Daughter," in which Miss Riding Hood morphs into a werewolf, strike at the heart. Through Nov. 27. (Pace Wildenstein, 142 Greene St. 431-9224.)

"Description Without Place"—This terrific show, with a title out of Wallace Stevens, inaugurates a season-long collaboration; the fashion showroom Staff USA and the gallery AC Project Room have invited several museum curators to present a series of exhibitions. Jeanne Silverthorne, Rita McBride, Liz Larner, and Jody Lee are all represented, with works that shift between sculpture, drawing, and photography. But Best of Show goes to the uncanny horse sculpture by Texan newcomer Erick Swenson. Moored on an ice floe, his "Edgar" sports blond ringlets, which also cover its shanks like leg warmers. It's T. Rex crossed with "My Little Pony." Through Dec. 4. (Staff USA, 495 Broadway. 925-9700, ext. 117).

Short List—**RICHARD ARTSCHWAGER,** Lehmann Maupin, 39 Greene St. 965-0753. Through Dec. 18. . . . **JACQUES FLECHEMULLER,** Gracie Mansion, 54 St. Marks Pl. 505-7055. Opens at noon, closed Tuesdays; through Dec. 4. . . . **Y. Z. KAMI,** Deitch Projects, 76 Grand St. 343-7300. Through Dec. 4. . . . **JEFF KOONS,** Sonnabend, 420 West Broadway. 966-6160. Through Dec. 18. . . . **ISSEY MIYAKE,** Ace, 275 Hudson St. 255-5599. Through Feb. 29. . . . **SARAH MORRIS,** Petzel, 26 Wooster St. 334-9466. Through Dec. 22. . . . **FRANK STELLA,** Sperone Westwater, 142 Greene St. 431-3685. Through Dec. 11. . . . **MARILEE STILES STERN,** Kind, 136 Greene St. 925-1200. Through Jan. 8. . . . **THOMAS WOODRUFF,** P.P.O.W, 476 Broome St. 941-8642. Through Dec. 23. . . . **ROB WYNNE,** Holly Solomon, 172 Mercer St. 941-5777. Through Dec. 23.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Sotheby's—Nov. 24: The second day of a sale of Latin-American art, including colonial-era paintings and silver, as well as modern and contemporary works. . . . ¶ Nov. 29: Nineteenth-century European paintings and sculptures. . . . ¶ Nov. 30: Fine American Indian art, including the Lucille and Marshall Miller collection of ancient and modern ceramics and the famous "Cartier Jar," a black-on-black pot by Maria and Julian Martinez, of the San Ildefonso Pueblo. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000.)

Christie's—Nov. 29: An auction of turn-of-the-century decorative arts includes American Arts and Crafts pieces from the collection of Barbra Streisand, as well as lamps and ceramics by Tiffany & Co. . . . ¶ Nov. 30: American paintings. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 636-2000.)

International 20th Century Arts Fair—A new show in which contemporary pieces are offered alongside examples from earlier modernist movements. (7th Regiment Armory, Park Ave. at 66th St. Nov. 27-Dec. 1, with a benefit preview on Nov. 26. For information, call 642-8572.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

Michael Ackerman—Ghostly black-and-white photographs that have an uneasy dreamlike effect, and a complicated sense of intimacy. In a series of interior images in Paris, the camera intrudes on the private moments of a dark-haired woman—crouched on a toilet, lying nude on a bed—and an undercurrent of self-consciousness hints at pornography. On a street in Benares, India, an old man exposes his body by opening up a towel like wings, but he walks with his eyes cast downward, as though he were defying the camera. Through Nov. 30. (Bodell, 13 E. 7th St. 477-1820. Open Tuesdays through Sundays, noon to 7.)

Bill Owens—Black-and-white photographs from Owens's landmark book, "Suburbia." Through Dec. 4. (Greenberg, 120 Wooster St. 334-0010.)

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"Walker Evans at *Fortune*"—Works made during Evans's twenty years (1945-65) as staff photographer and photo editor at *Fortune*. Through Dec. 4. (Gallery 292, at 120 Wooster St. 431-0292.)

Short List—**TOM BARIL,** Benrubi, 52 E. 76th St. 517-3766. Through Dec. 11. . . . **TINA BARNEY,** Borden, 560 Broadway. 431-0166. Through Dec. 18. . . . **JAYNE HINDS BIDAUT** and **LARRY GIANETTINO,** Ricco/Maresca, 529 W. 20th St. 627-4819. Both shows through Jan. 15. . . . **OLIVER BOBERG,** Morris, 465 W. 23rd St. 727-2752. Through Nov. 27. . . . **MASAHISA FUKASE,** Mann, 210 Eleventh Ave., at 25th St. 989-7600. Through Dec. 11. . . . **TIMOTHY GREENFIELD-SANDERS,** Boone, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 752-2929. Through Dec. 18. . . . **PAUL HIMMEL** and **ERWIN BLUMENFELD,** Danziger, 851 Madison Ave., at 70th St. 734-5300. Both shows through Nov. 27. . . . **MIKE SMITH** and **MARK STEINMETZ,** Richardson, 560 Broadway. 343-1255. Both shows through Nov. 27. . . . **THOMAS STRUTH,** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 977-7160. Open Mondays; through Dec. 31. . . . **JERRY UELSMANN,** Laurence Miller, 20 W. 57th St. 397-3930. Through Dec. 24.

(See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera—Boito's **MEFISTOFELE,** with Veronica Villarroel, Richard Leech, and Samuel Ramey; conducted by Mark Elder. (Nov. 24 at 8.) . . . With Aprile Millo instead of Ms. Villarroel. (Nov. 27 at 1:30.) . . . **TRISTAN UND ISOLDE,** with Jane Eaglen, Katarina Dalayman, Ben Heppner, Richard Paul Fink, and René Pape; James Levine. (Nov. 26 and Nov. 29 at 7.) . . . **OTELLO,** with Gabriela Beňačková, Vladimir Bogachov, and Sergei Leiferkus; Mr. Elder. (Nov. 27 at 8.) . . . **L'ELISIR D'AMORE,** with Angela Gheorghiu, Roberto Alagna, Dmitri Hvorostovsky, and Paul Plishka; Evelino Pidò. (Nov. 30 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

Amato Opera Company—Final performances of "Carmen." (Amato Opera Theatre, 319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 228-8200. Nov. 26-27 at 7:30 and Nov. 28 at 2:30.)

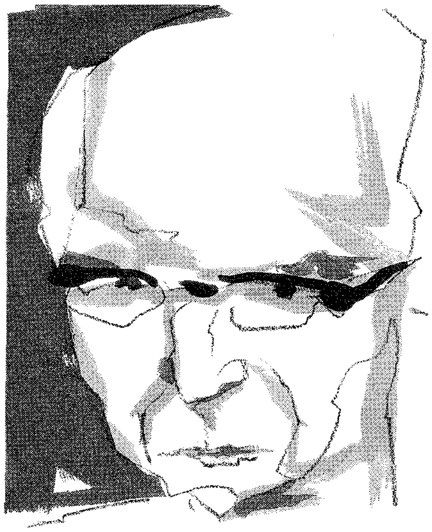
ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic—At Avery Fisher Hall, opening concerts in the orchestra's two-and-a-half-week Copland festival, in the course of which its musicians, plus a number of guests, will perform nearly all of the composer's orchestral, choral, chamber, and solo works. Nov. 24 and Nov. 27 at 8: Kurt Masur conducts the Symphonic Ode, the Clarinet Concerto (featuring the orchestra's principal clarinettist, Stanley Drucker), "Inscape," and "Four Dance Episodes from Rodeo." . . . ¶ Nov. 27 at 2: Mr. Masur conducts the Clarinet Concerto (with Mr. Drucker) and the "Four Dance Episodes from Rodeo," and Miguel Harth-Bedoya leads the original version, for thirteen instruments, of the "Appalachian Spring" ballet suite. . . . ¶ Nov. 30 at 7:30 and Dec. 2 at 8: Four conductors share duties at the podium in a program of ballet scores by Copland: Markand Thakar, leading a suite from "Hear Ye! Hear Ye!"; Leslie B. Dunner, conducting "Dance Panels"; George Hanson, directing the "Dance Symphony"; and Mr. Harth-Bedoya, overseeing the "Appalachian Spring" suite in its full orchestral version. (875-5030. . . . **NOTE:** Roundtables, lectures, and performances precede each concert.)

Russian Chamber Chorus of New York—Nikolai Kachanov directs Tchaikovsky's "Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom." (Weill Recital Hall, at Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Nov. 27 at 2.)

New York Chamber Symphony—Gerard Schwarz conducts Hans Pfitzner's "Kleine Sinfonie," a group of orchestral songs by Mahler (three each from "Des Knaben Wunderhorn" and the "Rückert-lieder," with mezzo-soprano Angelika Kirchschlager), Busoni's Concertino for Clarinet (featuring Jon Manasse), and Schubert's Symphony No. 5. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. Nov. 28-29 at 8.)

Jupiter Symphony—Jens Nygaard conducts Ignaz Pleyel's Symphony in C Major and Busoni's "Berceuse Élégiaque," in addition to two rarely played works featuring pianist Sara Davis Buechner: Chopin's "Krakowiak" and Paderewski's "Polish Fantasy." (Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church, 152 W. 66th St. Nov. 29 at 2 and 7 and Nov. 30 at 8. For information about tickets, call 799-1259.)



THOMAS LIBETTI

SINGULAR SERIALIST: *George Perle, a paterfamilias of modern music theorists, is being saluted this week and next in a pair of concerts honoring his eighty-fifth birthday. On November 30, at Cooper Union's Great Hall, the Da Capo Chamber Players perform five of his signature works, and on December 6, at Merkin Concert Hall, notable pianists offer solo keyboard pieces. That the birthday doesn't occur until next May is oddly appropriate, since he, too, has often been ahead of his time. He was among the first to perceive that Schoenberg's twelve-tone revolution need not be viewed as overthrowing all that had come before, but rather as a strategy that could point toward a new interpretation of what tonality is—a "twelve-tone tonality," as Perle calls it. His own compositions work out this theory with such wit and elegance that they sound less complicated than they actually are. Probably no American serial composer has enjoyed as much success with musical pundits as well as general listeners. Both types will be happy to start the celebrations early.*

Symphonicum Europae Orchestra—An ad-hoc assemblage of players from orchestras in fifty nations (plus a large chorus) offers a program of millennial optimism, comprising William Schuman's "American Festival Overture," Mascagni's "Hymn of the Sun," and Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Piero Gamba conducts. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. Nov. 29 at 8.)

RECITALS

Bargemusic—Pianist William Wolfram performs Schumann's "Humoreske" (Op. 20), three string players offer Schoenberg's String Trio, and all join for Fauré's Piano Quartet in C Minor. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-4061. Nov. 25 at 7:30 and Nov. 28 at 4.)

Grigory Sokolov—This Russian pianist started his career with a bang when, at the age of sixteen, he won first prize at the 1966 International Tchaikovsky Piano Competition, in a unanimous decision by a jury chaired by the eminent Emil Gilels, who became his mentor. Nonetheless, the Cold War severely limited his touring outside the Eastern Bloc during the formative years of his career, and his propensity for personal, idiosyncratic musical exploration, on top of a preference for playing recitals rather than high-profile concerto engagements, helped keep him outside the realm of international stardom. At its best, his playing combines Russian technical grandeur with a Gallic finesse in articulating counterpoint; on the other hand, it can display eccentricities that some listeners find off-putting. In this recital, his first in New York in more than two decades, Sokolov adheres to his habit of opening with a recherché piece of Baroque music—in this case, a suite he has put together from harpsichord movements by Johann Jakob Froberger—and continues with Beethoven's Sonata in C Major (Op. 2, No. 3) and Chopin's Sonata in B Minor. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. Nov. 27 at 8.)

Peter Bruns—Cellist, with pianist Roglit Ishai, performing sonatas by Fauré and Brahms (in F Major). (Le Refuge Inn, 620 City Island Ave., City Island, the Bronx. 718-885-2478. Nov. 28 at noon.)

Vesselina Kasarova—In her American début recital, the Bulgarian mezzo-soprano, whose voice weds impressive heft to the agility required for bel-canto roles, performs familiar songs by Schubert, Brahms, and Schumann. Pianist Friedrich Haider assists. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. Nov. 28 at 2.)

The Queen's Chamber Band—Three members of the ensemble—countertenor Marshall Coid, lutenist Jerry Willard, and virginalist Elaine Comparone—perform works from late-Renaissance England, by John Dowland and Giles Farnaby. (St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. Nov. 28 at 2. For information about tickets, call 932-9462.)

Anonymous 4—The women's vocal quartet, which specializes in the interpretation of medieval music, offers a program of music and readings exploring the legends surrounding Saint Nicholas. (Corpus Christi Church, 529 W. 121st St. 666-9266. Nov. 28 at 4.)

Steven Osborne—The British pianist performs Ravel's "Valses Nobles et Sentimentales," Schubert's Sonata in G Major (D. 894), and five of Messiaen's "Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant Jésus." (Frick Collection, 1 E. 70th St. 288-0700. Nov. 28 at 5.)

Manhattan Guitar Quartet—Performing arrangements of pieces by Michael Praetorius, Bach (his Third "Brandenburg" Concerto), and Rimsky-Korsakov, among others. (St. Paul's Chapel, Broadway at Fulton St. Nov. 29 at noon. Admission by contribution.)

Songs by Philip Glass—A passel of singers, including Suzanne Vega and Ute Lemper, are featured in vocal excerpts from the composer's film scores and theatre pieces. (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. Nov. 29 at 7.)

"Twentieth-Century Retrospectives"—This thought-provoking series was conceived as an annual program by the much lamented pianist Samuel Sanders; following his death last July, it's being husbanded by his pupil Audrey Axinn, at least through this season. Sanders had expressed a special passion for this year's subject, the musical formation and legacy of Nadia Boulanger, as he was one of the many Americans to have benefitted from her tutelage, either at the American Conservatory in Fontainebleau or at

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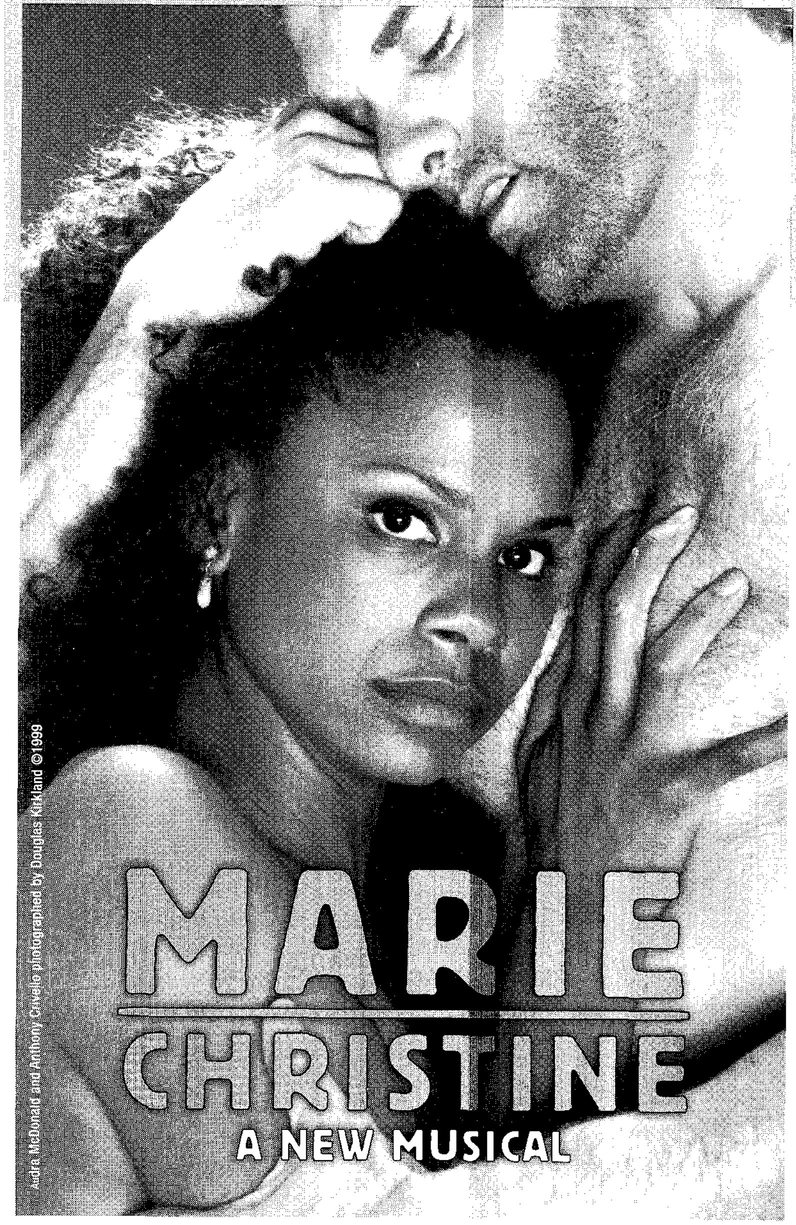
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Audra McDonald and Anthony Crivello photographed by Douglas Kirkland ©1999

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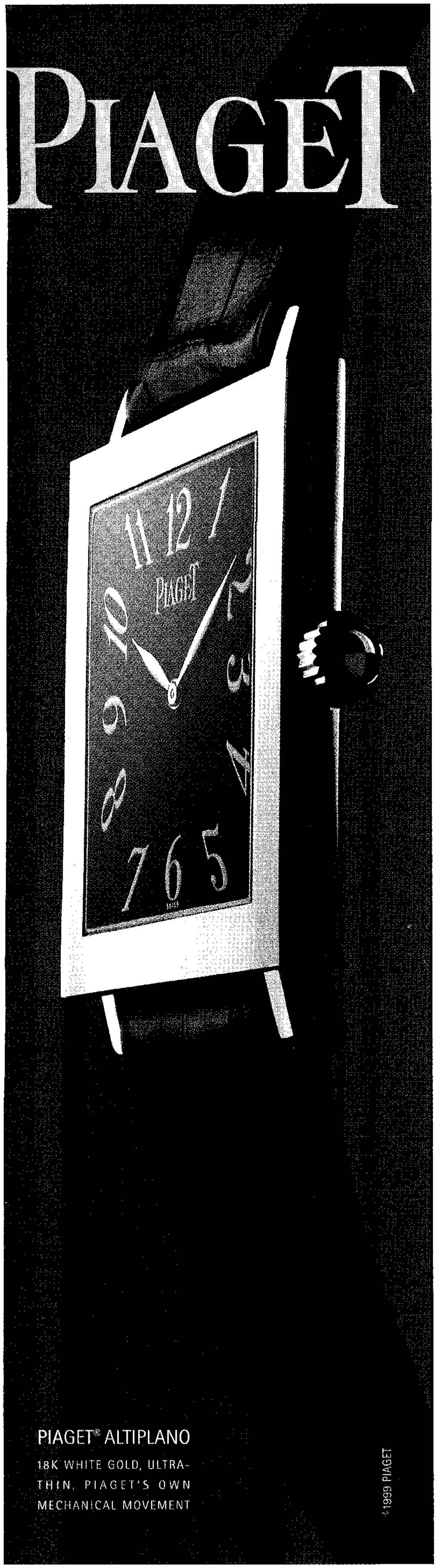

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her private studio, known as the Boulangerie, on the Rue Ballu in Paris. In the first of two concerts, students and faculty members of the Juilliard School perform Boulanger's "Lux Eterna"; the "Pie Jesu" by her sister, Lili, whose work Nadia championed; selections from Monteverdi's "Scherzi Musicali" (which Boulanger resurrected for twentieth-century audiences); works by her teachers Charles-Marie Widor (a portion of his "Symphonie Romane") and Gabriel Fauré (his C-Minor Piano Quintet); and Stravinsky's Octet for Wind Instruments. (Paul Hall, Juilliard School, 155 W. 65th St. Nov. 29 at 8. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 769-7406. The second concert, spotlighting music by Boulanger's pupils, follows on Dec. 3.)

Winds at Weill—A group of woodwind players (most of whom are members of the New York Philharmonic) includes in its program Carl Reinecke's Wind Sextet and Wallingford Riegger's Concerto for Piano and Woodwind Quintet (with pianist Robert Miller). (Weill Recital Hall. 247-7800. Nov. 29 at 8.)

Da Capo Chamber Players—As part of the Sonic Boom Festival, the ensemble, (assisted by soprano Lucy Shelton, trombonist David Taylor, pianist Stephen Gosling, and percussionist Tom Kolar) performs five works by George Perle—his "Sonata a Quattro," "Critical Moments," "Songs on Texts of Emily Dickinson," "Two Songs on Poems of Rilke," and "Sonata a Cinque"—in addition to the première of Paul Lansky's "Odd Moments," composed in honor of Mr. Perle's upcoming eighty-fifth birthday. (Great Hall, Cooper Union, Third Ave. at 7th St. Nov. 30 at 8. For information about tickets, call 279-4200.)

New York Festival of Song—An evening of Spanish and Latin-American songs and arias. (Weill Recital Hall. 247-7800. Nov. 30 at 8.)

"Piano Century"—The Juilliard School's season-long exploration of twentieth-century piano repertoire continues with pieces written in the nineteen-forties by eleven composers, including Boulez's Sonata No. 1, Cage's "The Perilous Night," and Chávez's "Étude-Homage to Chopin." (Paul Hall, Juilliard School, 155 W. 65th St. Nov. 30 at 8. No tickets necessary.)

Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio—The ensemble performs Ravel's Piano Trio and is assisted by violist Pinchas Zukerman in piano quartets by Mozart (in G Minor) and Dvořák (in E-Flat Major, Op. 87). (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. Nov. 30-Dec. 1 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

Readings—Nov. 29 at 7:30: By Melvin Jules Bukiet, Cynthia Ozick, and Benjamin Taylor, from their contributions to the fiction collection "Neurotica: Jewish Writers on Sex." (Barnes & Noble, Broadway at 82nd St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ Nov. 29 at 8: By writers Bobbie Ann Mason and Mary Robison, from their work. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100.) . . . ¶ Nov. 29 at 8: By poets Douglas Goetsch and Jacqueline Waters. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. Tickets at the door.)

Talks—Nov. 30 at 6:30: Charles Thornton discusses his experience as chief structural engineer of Kuala Lumpur's Petronas Towers, the tallest building in the world. (Skyscraper Museum, 16 Wall St. For reservations, which are required, call 766-1324.) . . . ¶ Nov. 30 at 6:30: Publishers Tim and Nina Zagat, *Times* writer Florence Fabricant, and *Saveur* editor Colman Andrews join restaurateurs Daniel Boulud and Drew Nieporent for a talk about New Yorkers and food. (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 355-6100.)

Department of Gluttony—Just in case you haven't had enough to eat this Thursday, Big Onion Walking Tours offers its annual post-Thanksgiving *Multi-Ethnic Eating Tour*, with stops on the Jewish Lower East Side and in Chinatown and Little Italy. (Nov. 26 at 1. For more information, call 439-1090.)

BOOK CURRENTS

Embattled Women

ELIZA GRAN

In July of 1917, a regiment of Russian women soldiers called the Battalion of Death launched an offensive against German troops outside Petrograd, both to defend Mother Russia and to shame male deserters. **Lines of Fire: Women Writers of World War I** (Plume), a collection of hundreds of wartime accounts, includes the journalist Bessie Beatty's interview with one of the fighters, who explained that, when wounded Germans took cover in a hut and refused to surrender, "we had to throw hand-grenades in and destroy them. No; war is not easy for a woman."

Elizabeth D. Leonard's **All the Daring of the Soldier** (Norton) provides dashing histories and photographs of some of the hundreds of women who "disguised themselves as men and enlisted as full-fledged soldiers during the Civil War." It also commemorates their Revolutionary forerunner, Deborah Sampson, who fought British troops and Indians near Tarrytown in 1792, taking "a glancing saber blow to her forehead and a bullet in her leg."

The Women Who Wrote the War (Arcade), by Nancy Caldwell Sorel, explores the headstrong, headlong lives of women who chronicled the Second World War. Janet Flanner profiled Hitler, the photojournalist Lee Miller bathed in the dictator's bathtub as Berlin burned, and in Madrid, during the Spanish Civil War, the ladylike BBC correspondent Virginia Cowles navigated rubble-strewn streets in tiny, high-heeled shoes. Caught in a barrage of trench mortar fire at the front lines, she had to beat a hasty retreat through tunnels to a Popular Front hideout.

Many of the entries in **Her War Story** (Southern Illinois University) deal with women's experience of the wider theatre of modern war. Dorothy Parker, for instance, sees a woman and her soldier husband at a café during a brief visit, looking at their baby "in a sort of ecstasy of admiration." Colette describes an aerial bombardment of Verdun, in the winter of 1915. The bomb is a "wicked tapered seed" that gives the trees a "brutal pruning," she writes. "In a freshly opened hole in the ground children are looking for shrapnel, babbling and scratching like chickens after a shower."

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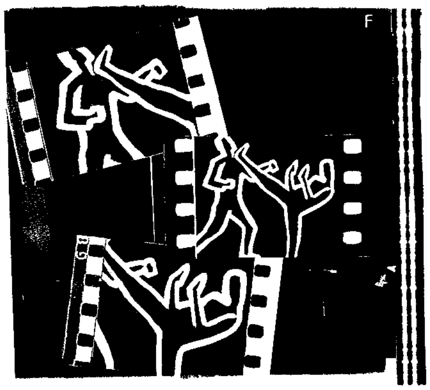


THE MOVIES

OPENING

End of Days—A millennial thriller. Arnold Schwarzenegger must defeat the Devil, who has surfaced as (what else?) a businessman. Directed by Peter Hyams. Opening Nov. 24. (Chelsea West, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, Union Square, Waverly, and Ziegfeld.)

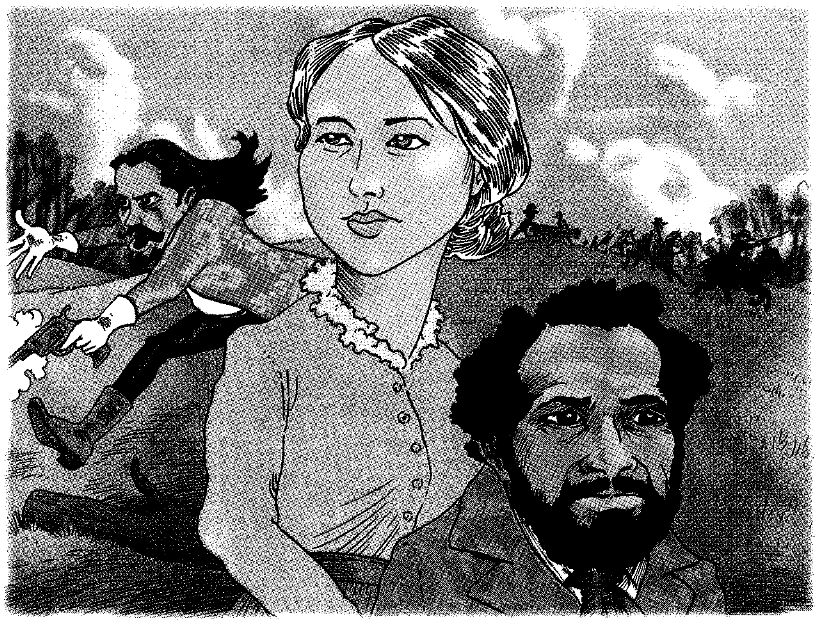
Flawless—Robert De Niro plays a conservative security guard who suffers a stroke and then reluctantly undergoes rehabilitation with the help of a drag queen (Philip Seymour Hoffman). Written and directed by Joel Schumacher. Opening Nov. 24. (Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, State, and Village Theatre VII.)

A Moment of Innocence—Iranian director Mohsen Makhmalbaf re-creates the events of the day on which he stabbed one of the Shah's policemen. In Farsi. Opening Nov. 26. (Cinema Village.)

Ride with the Devil—Ang Lee's Civil War drama about the Bushwackers, a group of pro-Southern vigilantes. With Skeet Ulrich, Tobey Maguire, Jewel, and Jeffrey Wright. Opening Nov. 24. (Lincoln Square and Union Square.)

Toy Story 2—Woody and Buzz Lightyear return, in all their computer-animated glory. Directed by John Lasseter. Opening Nov. 24. (East 86th Street Cinemas, Sutton, and Village East Cinemas.)

Tumbleweeds—A working-class Southern mom and her twelve-year-old daughter head west. Directed by Gavin O'Connor. Opening Nov. 24. (Chelsea Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, 62nd & Broadway, and Union Square.)



Skeet Ulrich, Jewel, and Jeffrey Wright in Ang Lee's "Ride with the Devil."

TONY MILLIONAIRE

2 by 4—A Bronx construction foreman confronts buried memories when he befriends a young hustler. Directed by and starring Jimmy Smallhorne. Opening Nov. 26. (Quad Cinema.)

FILM NOTES

(If a movie has been reviewed recently in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given.)

All About My Mother—Pedro Almodóvar calls his new movie "a screwball drama," and it's only moderately entertaining. Manuela (Cecilia Roth), a reformed whore, loses her teen-age son in a car accident and goes in search of the boy's father, who knew nothing of his son's existence. She doesn't find him—at least not at first—but in Barcelona she falls in with an old friend, a transvestite prostitute (Antonia San Juan), and then with a great actress (Marisa Paredes) and her younger lover (Candela Peña), who are playing Blanche DuBois and Stella in a production of "A Streetcar Named Desire." The movie is a tribute to actresses who play actresses, but this specialized skill is also offered as a metaphor for women who, it is implied, can only create life in the shadow of men through deceit, manipulation, and role-playing. Almodóvar is trying for a new seriousness, but despite the presence of tempestuous actresses and transsexuals, the material doesn't have the giddiness he usually achieves. In Spanish.—*David Denby* (11/22/99) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Anywhere But Here—Wayne Wang, the director of "The Joy Luck Club," has made another picture that feels proudly bereft of men. A few of them get walk-on parts as dopes or turncoats, but most of the space is occupied by Adele August (Susan Sarandon) and her teen-age daughter, Ann (Natalie Portman). The two of them leave a settled life in Wisconsin and head for the riskier pleasures of Los Angeles, where the bulk of their relationship is consumed by arguments about their relationship; for a movie about escape, it seems dangerously trapped in its own predicament. If you want the Wang who made "Slamdance" and "Smoke," with their lightness and glee, you'll have to wait for his next film; meanwhile, this one is rescued and redeemed by the presence of Natalie Portman, whose portrait of grave and lovely bafflement may be the best work she's done.—*Anthony Lane* (11/15/99) (Chelsea West, Criterion Center, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Park & 86th Street Cinemas.)

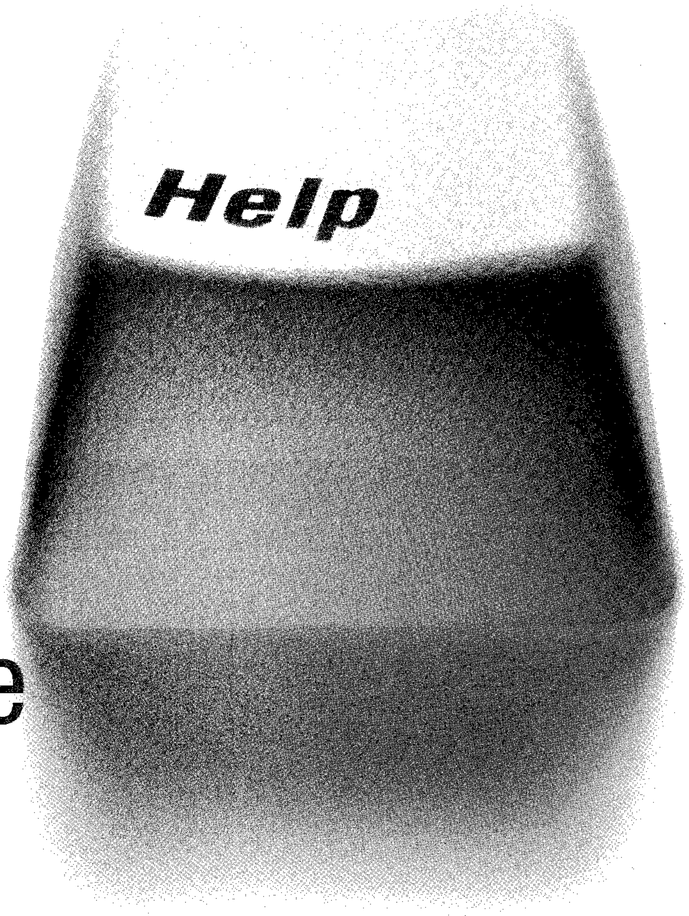
The Bachelor—Chris O'Donnell produces and stars in this slack retread of Buster Keaton's silent comic romp "Seven Chances." The story, about a man who has to get married within twenty-four hours in order to inherit his grandfather's fortune, hasn't been updated much. It's an anachronistic and, at times, culturally clueless undertaking; at one point, the bachelor is seen cavorting in a wild herd of available men, while women in pursuit fling lassos around their necks. The comedy is of the old ball-and-chain variety—there's not a hint of modern, knowing humor. Renée Zellweger co-stars as the long-suffering girlfriend who rejects the bachelor's crass proposal, and Brooke Shields (in full drag-queen mode) appears as a financially strapped socialite.—*Bruce Diones* (Criterion Center, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, and Orpheum VII.)

Being John Malkovich—An out-of-work puppeteer (John Cusack), his pet-loving girlfriend (Cameron Diaz), and a cynical office worker (Catherine Keener) take turns entering the head of the actor John Malkovich, where they remain for fifteen minutes at a time, experiencing everything he does, before being deposited with a whoosh beside the New Jersey Turnpike. This fantastic weightless comedy, which was written by Charlie Kaufman and directed by Spike Jonze, plays with notions of celebrity worship and gender reversal, but the best thing about it is the genially deadpan style of its most absurd inventions.—*D.D.* (11/22/99) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, and Village Theatre VII.)

The Best Man—A sleek and somewhat sophisticated ensemble comedy by first-time writer-director Malcolm Lee. It's a "My Best Friend's Wedding" type of picture with some "Big Chill" background, and the great-looking cast—Taye Diggs, Nia Long, Morris Chestnut, and Terrence Howard—makes it a finely tuned date movie.—*B.D.* (Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, and Union Square.)

The Bone Collector—Denzel Washington and Angelina Jolie may have signed on to this picture believing they were going to do a "Rear Window"-type thriller, but the film, while sharply directed by Phillip Noyce, is so badly plotted that it feels like an episode of "Ironside." Washington plays a forensics expert, a quadriplegic confined to his bed, who guides a police rookie (Jolie) through a series of clues to catch a gruesome serial killer. Noyce jacks up the slick production values and cool camera angles to give the picture some pizzazz, but the hokey dialogue and catch-the-killer philosophizing kills most of the tension. Although Washington's charisma shines, Jolie gives such a thin performance that it's almost laughable.—*B.D.* (Coronet Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, and Village Theatre VII.)

Boys Don't Cry—In small-town Nebraska, a young woman named Teena Brandon (Hilary Swank) clips her hair into a butch cut, flattens her breasts, puts on boys' clothes and a boy's swagger, and passes in the world as Brandon Teena, handsome young dude. What she feels is pure exhilaration, the excitement of leaving her past behind and becoming a lover; what we feel is dismay and fear. Brandon falls in with a group of derelict, white-trash kids and attracts the languid beauty Lana (Chloë Sevigny), who allows herself to think that Brandon is a man—with inevitably disastrous results. The movie is a fine, terrifying tragic poem



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that is also, at times, subversively funny: the women who like Brandon seem to want the feminine as well as the masculine in a lover. Directed by Kimberly Peirce, and written by Peirce and Andy Bienen. Based on actual events, which were the subject last year of a documentary called "The Brandon Teena Story."—*D.D.* (10/18-25/99) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Union Square.)

Bringing Out the Dead—Martin Scorsese teams up with Paul Schrader—his screenwriter on "Taxi Driver" and other pictures—for a return to New York. This time, the means of transport is an ambulance, and the hero is a weary paramedic by the name of Frank Pierce (Nicolas Cage). Frank keeps losing more patients than he saves; indeed, his world has gone into decline before the story even begins, and Cage's dour, dark-eyed resignation sits uneasily with the restive, high-energy look of the film. It's not so much plotted as peopled with recurring figures, both alive and dead: a practicing lunatic, a young asthma sufferer who dies in Frank's arms, and a numb ex-junkie (Patricia Arquette) who just won't leave him alone. Then there are the other paramedics, played by John Goodman, Tom Sizemore, and Ving Rhames. Of these, only Rhames takes the movie by the throat and finds the black farce within it, mocking the somnolence (and the lyrical voice-overs) that prevails elsewhere.—*A.L.* (11/1/99) (Art Greenwich Twin, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, 72nd Street East, and Village Theatre VII.)

Dogma—This is obviously the growth season for indie kids. Just as David O. Russell has graduated from nerdy comedy to "Three Kings," so Kevin Smith, lord of the zero budget ("Clerks," "Chasing Amy"), has decided to stretch himself with this sprawling, star-stuffed fantasy on the trifling theme of good and evil. It even has special effects: fairly cruddy ones, it's true, but there was a time when the most special Kevin Smith effect was two consecutive minutes of audible sound. His unlikely plot features Matt Damon and Ben Affleck, the Abbott and Costello of the next millennium, as a couple of renegade angels who spot a chance to reënter heaven and thus terminate the universe. Up against them is a rank of supernatural forces—played by Alan Rickman, Chris Rock, Jason Lee, and Selma Hayek—a perplexed earthling (Linda Fiorentino), and a couple of unwitting prophets, played by the grungy Jason Mewes and the bearded Smith himself, back by popular demand from his previous pictures. The result has some great lines, but it's a muddle that turns into a mess; there have been cries of distress about the film's attack on organized religion, but no self-respecting church could seriously claim to be damaged by this extended skit. With Alanis Morissette as God.—*A.L.* (11/15/99) (Art Greenwich Twin, BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, East 85th Street, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.)

Fast Times at Ridgemont High (1982)—Not bad. It may fall into the general category of youth-exploitation movies, but it isn't assaultive. The young director, Amy Heckerling, making her feature-film début, has a light hand. If the film has a theme, it's sexual embarrassment, but there are no big crises; the story follows the course of several kids' lives by means of vignettes and gags, and when the scenes miss they don't thud. With Jennifer Jason Leigh as the fifteen-year-old Stacy, who is eager to learn about sex, Phoebe Cates as the jaded Valley Girl Linda, who shares what she knows, and Sean Penn as the surfer-doper Spicoli, the most amiable stoned kid imaginable.—*Pauline Kael* (American Museum of the Moving Image; Nov. 28.)

Georgy Girl (1966)—A glib little farce that tickled a lot of people. Georgy (Lynn Redgrave) is a brontosaurus of a girl who's childlike and "natural" and artistic, and the picture is determinedly heartwarming and kinky and on the side of youth. We're supposed to like Georgy because she acts out her ludicrous and self-pitying impulses, and doesn't think too much about it afterward. With James Mason, Charlotte Rampling, Alan Bates, and Rachel Kempson. Directed by Silvio Narizzano.—*P.K.* (Film Forum; Nov. 30.)

Horse Feathers (1932)—The Marx Brothers in one of their niftiest corny-surreal comedies; it isn't in the class of their "Duck Soup," but then what is? The setting is academic, with emphasis on football; Groucho is Professor Wagstaff, the new president of Huxley College, who explains his policy in the song "Whatever It Is, I'm Against It," and Thelma Todd is the college widow to whom all four brothers make overtures. Norman McLeod directed from a screenplay by Bert Kalmar and Harry Ruby (who also wrote the songs) and S. J. Perelman and Will B. Johnstone.—*P.K.* (Walter Reade Theatre; Nov. 30.)

The Insider—A self-important but juicily entertaining public-affairs melodrama about big-time journalism and corporate villainy. Russell Crowe plays the real-life whistle-blower Jeffrey Wigand, who in 1995 had devastating things to reveal about his former employer, tobacco giant Brown & Williamson, and Al Pacino is the bristling "60 Minutes" producer Lowell Bergman, who was stymied in bringing Wigand's information to the public. They are meant to represent two kinds of personal honor arrayed against corporate game-players, including Michael Gambon as a tobacco executive and Christopher Plummer as a mildly satirized Mike Wallace. Director Michael Mann creates a rising line of tension and paranoia which leads to a muted, not entirely reassuring ending.—*D.D.* (11/8/99) (Chelsea West, Cinema I, East 86th Street Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.)

Liberty Heights—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Lincoln Square and Village Theatre VII.)

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Mansfield Park—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Angelika Film Center and Paris.)

The Messenger: The Story of Joan of Arc—Brutal mace-swinging battle scenes, Help-I'm-having-a-vision digital effects, and histrionic and embarrassing performances give this enterprise classic bad-movie status. Director Luc Besson, working again with his wife, Milla Jovovich (they teamed for the equally excessive "The Fifth Element"), has no problem achieving some startling visual moments, but his rapid editing style quickly dulls the senses (he makes Oliver Stone's rat-a-tat cutting look positively geriatric). Any discussion about whether Joan was a messenger of God or a madwoman who really knew how to rally a crowd is trampled by the ranting-and-raving screenplay. The movie hits its height of absurdity when Jovovich, in prison, has a vision of Dustin Hoffman (billed in the credits as "The Conscience"), which leads her, understandably, to question her sanity.—*B.D.* (Criterion Center, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, and Village Theatre VII.)

Pokémon: The First Movie—Nintendo's hugely popular pocket-monster game (the object is to capture and train for combat a hundred and fifty-one characters with different powers and personalities) has been turned into a

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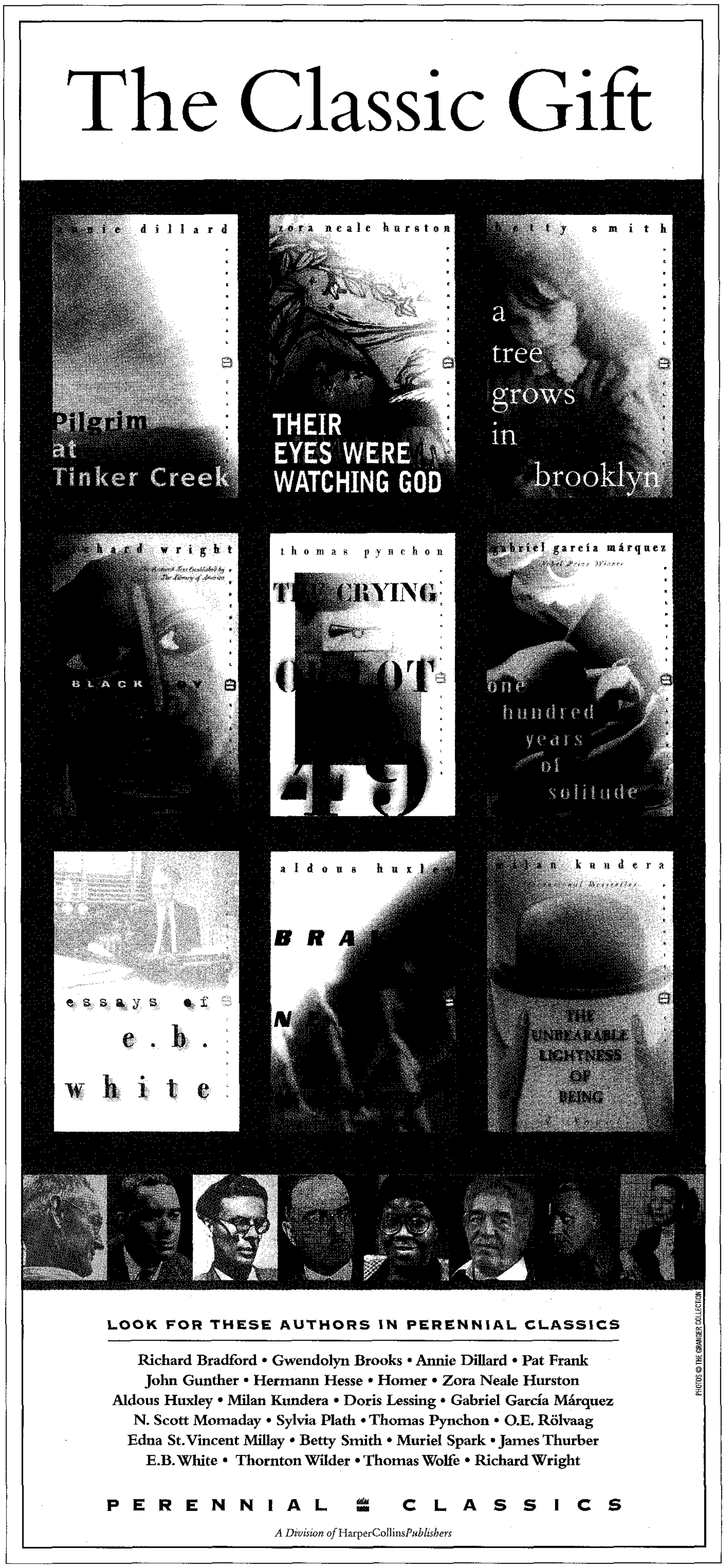

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highly effective and very entertaining kiddie flick. The plot has a boy named Ash trying to prevent the cloning of a pokémon and save his faithful companion, Pikachu. There's more to the storytelling than that, though, since the Pokémon world is far more baroque than you'd expect from such a cartoon phenomenon. It aims for an almost mythological fantasyland with a depth that such earlier kiddie blockbusters as the Power Rangers and the Ninja Turtles never aspired to. All marketing issues aside (and there are many), the animation itself is a lot finer than you'd expect from such a blatant cash-cow enterprise.—*B.D.* (Chelsea Cinemas, Coronet Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema, Orpheum VII, and Union Square.)

Princess Mononoke—This handsome, beautifully designed Japanese animated film has the size—though not the clarity—of a great Japanese film epic. The plot is more complicated than that of "The Ring of the Niebelungen," and it's impossible, at times, to tell who's fighting on whose side, and why. Minnie Driver, Billy Crudup, Billy Bob Thornton, Gillian Anderson, and Claire Danes provide the voices. Hayao Miyazaki is the director.—*D.D.* (Angelika Film Center, Cinema II, and Lincoln Square.)

Rosetta—The camera crowds in behind Rosetta (Emilie Dequenne), a girl maybe seventeen or eighteen, as she goes about her furious, mole-like economic activity, selling mended clothes, fishing in a miserable swamp, running back and forth between the trailer camp in which she lives and the waffle stands of a rain-soaked Belgian city. This dour but stirring masterpiece of moral inquiry (it won the Palme d'Or at Cannes last summer) was written and directed by the Belgians Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne. In French.—*D.D.* (11/8/99) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

Seven Chances (1925)—The plot gimmick—the hero must be married in a few hours in order to collect an inheritance—is an antique, and the play flopped on Broadway, but what Buster Keaton and his gag writers managed to do with the material will be everlastingly fresh. When the news of the shy hero's need to wed is published in the papers, prospective brides arrive, singly at first and then in droves, and the distraught man, fleeing them, dislodges a boulder, which dislodges others, and soon he is pursued by hundreds of huge boulders. It's a lovely comedy, imaginatively—possibly faultlessly—directed by Keaton. Silent.—*P.K.* (Symphony Space; Nov. 30.)

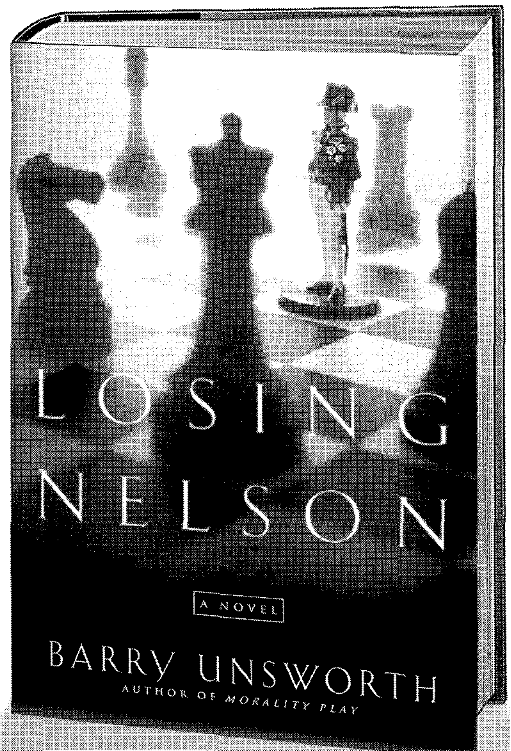
Sleepy Hollow—For a good part of Tim Burton's retelling of Washington Irving's old tale we seem to be watching the same magnificent shots of a headless horseman riding a black steed through the darkened woods. The enraged demon rears up, with billowing cape, and then advances at a gallop onto a terrified victim and swings his blade: more heads roll in this two-hour film than in the Place de la Concorde throughout the entire Reign of Terror. Burton's work is impressively sinister—the light is invariably a sombre, chill gray; foul mists, like a spreading poison, envelop the streets and houses. But, like any stylized look that lacks sufficient human interest, the atmosphere of "Sleepy Hollow" grows monotonous. Johnny Depp is charming but weightless as Ichabod Crane, rationalist seeker of truth. The other characters—men with pale, pinched faces in frock coats and wigs, women in Empire-style gowns with corseted breasts—make stunning first impressions, but then they start talking gibberish and we lose interest. With Miranda Richardson, Michael Gambon, and Christina Ricci. Cinematography by Emmanuel Lubezki.—*D.D.* (11/22/99) (42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

The Straight Story—By way of a comic coda to the violent "Lost Highway," David Lynch has confounded all expectations and come up with a movie about a lawnmower. The model in question, a gas-guzzling 1966 John Deere, is ridden by the elderly Alvin Straight (who was a real person, but it's a perfect Lynch name) all the way from Laurens, Iowa, to Mt. Zion, Wisconsin, on a mission of mercy to his brother, Lyle. The result is a perplexing blend of the ornery and the ornate; Richard Farnsworth plays Alvin as a stubbornly decent sort, while Lynch riddles his journey with bursts of calculated strangeness—including a house ablaze by the side of the road, attended by firemen who might have stepped out of "Blue Velvet."—*A.L.* (11/1/99) (American Museum of the Moving Image, Eastside Playhouse, and Village East Cinemas.)

The World Is Not Enough—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Astor Plaza, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Olympia, Orpheum VII, Union Square, and Waverly.)

ALSO PLAYING

AMERICAN BEAUTY (9/20/99): BAM Rose Cinemas, Beekman, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatres, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII. . . . **AMERICAN MOVIE:** Film Forum. . . . **BOILING POINT** (1990): Cinema Village. . . . **THE BRANDON TEENA STORY:** The Screening Room. . . . **BUENA VISTA SOCIAL CLUB:** Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **THE CITY:** Quad Cinema. . . . **THE DINNER GAME:** Cinema Village. . . . **DOUBLE JEOPARDY:** Art Greenwich Twin, 84th Street Sixplex, 59th Street East Cinema, Orpheum VII, and State. . . . **FELICIA'S JOURNEY:** Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **FIGHT CLUB** (10/18-25/99): Criterion Center,



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At Walter Reade Theatre, Hoagy Carmichael in “Canyon Passage,” being shown to celebrate the centenary of his birth.

PHOTOFEST

First & 62nd Cinemas, Olympia, and Union Square. . . . **42 UP:** Film Forum. . . . **HAPPY, TEXAS** (10/11/99): The Screening Room. . . . **HOME PAGE:** Cinema Village. . . . **THE HOUSE ON HAUNTED HILL:** 84th Street Sixplex, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, State, and Union Square. . . . **LAST NIGHT:** Cinema Village. . . . **LIGHT IT UP:** Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, Olympia, and Union Square. . . . **THE LIMEY** (10/11/99): Angelika Film Center and Cinema 3rd Avenue. . . . **LOLA AND BILLY THE KID:** Quad Cinema. . . . **MUSIC OF THE HEART:** 84th Street Sixplex, Gotham Cinema, Kips Bay Theatre, and Village East Cinemas. . . . **RANDOM HEARTS:** 64th and 2nd. . . . **RUN LOLA RUN:** Village East Cinemas. . . . **THE SIXTH SENSE** (8/23-30/99): Criterion Center and Village East Cinemas.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

(Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.)

FILM FORUM, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—A program of films celebrating Columbia Pictures’ seventy-fifth anniversary. Nov. 24-25: “The Big Heat” (1953, Fritz Lang) and “Human Desire” (1954, Lang). . . . Nov. 26-27: “Taxi Driver” (1977, Martin Scorsese) and “Obsession” (1976, Brian De Palma). . . . Nov. 28: “Suddenly, Last Summer” (1959, Joseph L. Mankiewicz) and “Walk on the Wild Side” (1962, Edward Dmytryk). . . . Nov. 29: “The King Steps Out” (1936, Josef von Sternberg) and “This Thing Called Love” (1940, Alexander Hall). . . . Nov. 30: “Georgy Girl” (†) and “To Sir, with Love” (1967, James Clavell).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—Through Nov. 29: A program of films directed by Errol Morris. . . . ¶ A program of silent films, 1893 to 1928, from the museum’s collection. Nov. 26 at 3 and Nov. 27 at 5: “Burn ’Em Up Barnes” (1921, George André Beranger and Johnny Hines). . . . Nov. 26 at 8:15 and Nov. 28 at 2: “The President” (1920, Carl Theodor Dreyer; German intertitles). . . . Nov. 27 at 3: “Erotikon” (1920, Mauritz Stiller; Swedish intertitles). . . . Nov. 28 at 5: “Queen Elizabeth” (1912, Louis Mercanton). . . . Nov. 30 at 3: “Hail the Woman” (1921, John Griffith Wray). . . . ¶ Nov. 29 at 6: “Near Dark” (1987, Kathryn Bigelow). . . . ¶ Three films directed by Barry Levinson. Nov. 29 at 6: “Tin Men” (1987). . . . Nov. 30 at 2:30: “Avalon” (1990). . . . Nov. 30 at 6: “Diner” (1982).

WALTER READE THEATRE, Lincoln Center (875-5600)—Through Nov. 25: “The Silence” (1988) and “A Moment of Innocence” (1996), two films by Mohsen Makhmalbaf; in Farsi, with English subtitles. . . . ¶ Nov. 26-27 at 6:30 and 8:30: Three short silent films, with music by the Alloy Orchestra. . . . ¶ Two films featuring Hoagy Carmichael. Nov. 28 at 2 and 6 and Nov. 29 at 3: “Canyon Passage” (1946, Jacques Tourneur). . . . Nov. 28 at 4 and 8 and Nov. 29 at 1: “To Have and Have Not” (1944, Howard Hawks). . . . ¶ Nov. 30 at 2, 6, and 9:20: “Monkey Business” (1931, Norman Z. McLeod). . . . ¶ Nov. 30 at 4 and 7:45: “Horse Feathers” (†).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770)—Nov. 24: “The Torrent” (1926, Monta Bell; silent). . . . Nov. 25-27: “La Vie de Jésus” (1997, Bruno Dumont; in French). . . . Nov. 28: “King of Marvin Gardens” (1972, Bob Rafelson). . . . Nov. 29: “The Bitter Tea of General Yen” (1933, Frank Capra). . . . Nov. 30: “Fellini’s Roma” (1972, Federico Fellini; in Italian).

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—A program called “Restless and Rebellious: Teen Movies Then and Now.” Nov. 27 at 2: “Rebel Without a Cause” (1955, Nicholas Ray). . . . Nov. 27 at 4:30: “Go” (1999, Doug Liman). . . . Nov. 28 at 2: “Fast Times at Ridgemont High” (†). . . . Nov. 28 at 4: “Coming Soon” (1999, Colette Burson).

SYMPHONY SPACE, Broadway at 95th St. (864-5400)—A program of films with Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin. Nov. 26 at 7: “The General” (1926, Keaton and Clyde Bruckman; silent). . . . Nov. 26 at 8:30: “City Lights” (1931, Chaplin; silent). . . . Nov. 27 at 2 and Nov. 28 at 3:45: Two programs of short silent films with Keaton. . . . Nov. 27 at 4 and Nov. 28 at 2: Two programs of short silent films with Chaplin. . . . Nov. 27 at 7: “Limelight” (1952, Chaplin). . . . Nov. 27 at 9:45: “The Cameraman” (1928, Edward Sedgwick; silent), with Keaton. . . . Nov. 28 at 7: “Sherlock Jr.” (1924, Keaton; silent). . . . Nov. 28 at 8: “Monsieur Verdoux” (1947, Chaplin). . . . Nov. 29 at 7: “The Kid” (1921, Chaplin; silent) and “Sunnyside” (1919, Chaplin; silent). . . . Nov. 29 at 8:45: “Steamboat Bill, Jr.” (1928, Charles Reisner; silent), with Keaton. . . . Nov. 30 at 7: “Seven Chances” (†). . . . Nov. 30 at 8:30: “The Great Dictator” (1940, Chaplin).

A DIFFERENT LIGHT BOOKSTORE, 151 W. 19th St. (989-4850)—A Sunday-night series of free films (and popcorn). On Nov. 28 at 7, the feature will be “All About Eve” (1950, Joseph L. Mankiewicz).

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES, 32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5110)—Nov. 24 and Nov. 26 at 7, Nov. 27 at 3 and 7, Nov. 28 at 3, and Nov. 29 at 7: “Secret Defense” (1998, Jacques Rivette; in French). . . . From Nov. 26: The 7th Annual African Diaspora Film Festival.

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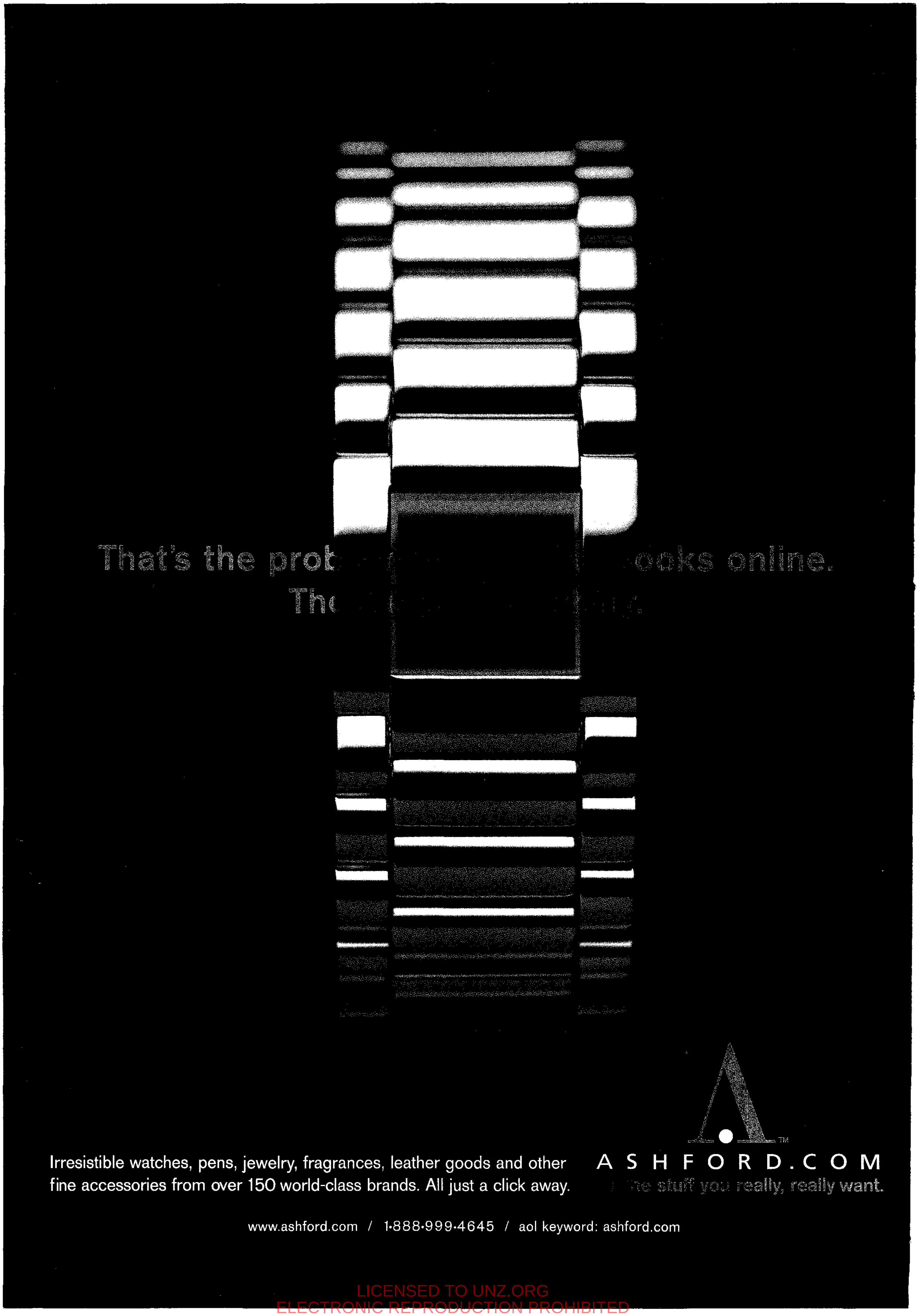
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THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT

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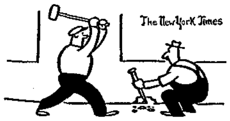
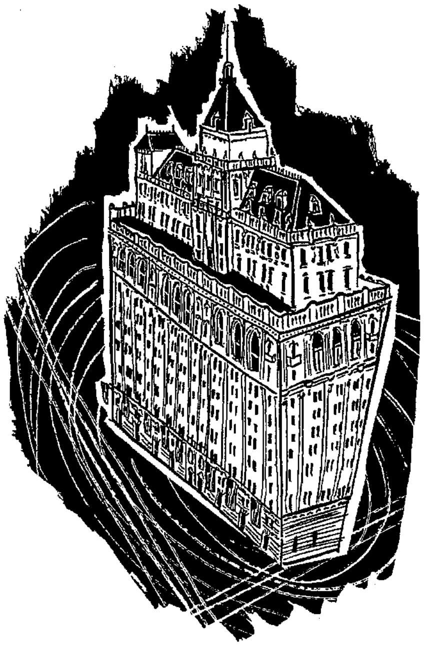


The news that the *Times* is thinking of abandoning the address to which it gave its name, Times Square, has implications that go beyond the sentimental. No one has yet proposed changing the name of the place back to Longacre Square, but would it be Times Square without the *Times*? Never mind that the newspaper's headquarters, a dingy fourteen-story white brick factory with a frilly French-château top, which it has occupied since 1913, isn't technically on Times Square, but just off it, on West Forty-third Street. The *Times* was there before everyone else, and the gentrification it has awaited for the better part of a century has arrived, in full force. Instead of presiding over a neighborhood of massage parlors and porno theatres, the *Times* is the dowager in what seems like ground zero of all media, with Viacom, Bertelsmann, Condé Nast, and ABC and MTV studios arrayed all around it, and more to follow. But, now that the newspaper of record finally finds itself in the center of the action, Arthur Sulzberger, Jr., the chairman of the New York Times Company, is wondering whether he wouldn't rather build a new headquarters a couple of blocks away, on Eighth Avenue, a bit closer to the frontier.

Newspapers, after all, no longer require special buildings; they print in satellite plants, and can be edited anywhere. That's why the *Daily News* left its home on East Forty-second Street a few years ago, and why the *Post* fled the waterfront for an anonymous floor on Sixth Avenue. A spiffy new building with all the latest high-tech gimmicks may appeal to the *Times'* current management a lot more than the heavy presence of history, especially when that history—which isn't landmarked—can be sold to eager developers.

It all sounds like another one of those gentrification stories in which a neighborhood's most venerable occupant decides it has no choice but to cash out. This isn't the way it was supposed to end up. Of course, almost nothing that has happened in Times Square has happened the way it was expected to.



All through the nineteen-sixties and seventies, planners came up with one unsuccessful scheme after another to revive the area. The one that nearly made it (and laid the groundwork for what is happening now) was the most ambitious: a 1981 joint city-state project which involved the construction of four huge office towers. It was hated by almost everyone, and was undone by the collapse of the real-estate market. Things got going again in the nineties with the discovery that retail and entertainment had begun to dance a strange new synergistic waltz. The Walt Disney Company was the first to capitalize on it, by restoring the New Amsterdam Theatre and putting a Disney store on what had once been one of the city's most troubled blocks.

Then the economy revived, and office towers came back into the picture. The new buildings are gleaming, glib works of architecture, not a little desperate in their attempt to look dignified. This is not the Times Square of Toffinetti's and the Hotel Astor, but then it isn't the row of inert Third Avenue boxes that the critics feared, either. It's a new urban form, a kind of downtown for a post-urban age, driven by desire. No one *needs* Times Square anymore—you don't have to get your news off the zipper sign, you don't have to get your entertainment on Broadway, and you certainly don't have to gather on the streets when something big happens, as people did on V-J Day, in 1945, perhaps the greatest moment in the history of Times Square, when it truly functioned as a town common for the world.

Yet, more people are expected to gather in Times Square this year to watch the ball drop on New Year's Eve than ever before, and not only because of the millennium. The architect Rem Koolhaas claims that technology has replaced public space with virtual space, that the only urban space that matters in our time is the one we connect to on the computer. If that were true, Times Square would be a quaint and empty relic. We may grit our teeth at Times Square's teeming new slickness, but at least it's not cute, and it isn't lovable. It's calculating, just the way big New York public places always have been. It wants to lift our hearts—and our wallets—and

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

there isn't much difference on that score between the latest fibre-optic signs on the Marriott Marquis Hotel and the rows of white light bulbs that made the marquees glow at the turn of the century. Put some large-scale technology outdoors where it will attract a lot of people, and surround it with some paying entertainment. That's the recipe for public space at Times Square. It hasn't changed, and it isn't going to.

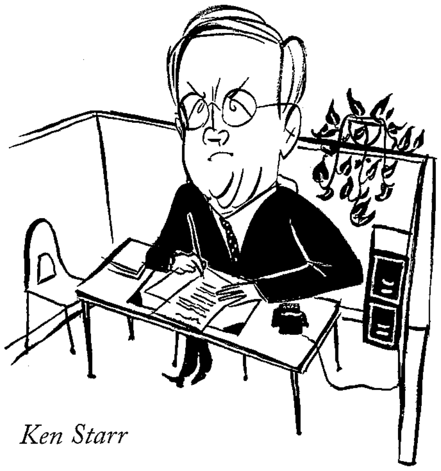
—PAUL GOLDBERGER

THE BENCH

Wanted: zealous-inquisitor type, must be willing to take pay cut.

CRITICS of the office of the independent counsel Kenneth Starr have often bemoaned the expense to taxpayers of his five-year, fifty-million-dollar (or so) investigation of President Clinton. It now appears that the inquiry may end up being costly for Starr as well.

Over the past several months, Starr has been negotiating a return to his job as a partner in the Washington office of Kirkland & Ellis, a law firm based in Chicago. Starr joined the firm in 1993, after he resigned as solicitor general in the Bush Administration. Though he was named independent counsel the following year, he maintained his partnership for the first four years of his sweeping investigation of the President. He took a leave of absence in 1998, when the Monica Lewinsky investigation had begun to absorb all his time. In October, when he stepped down as special prosecutor, he began weighing a return to K. & E.



Ken Starr

Starr's possible restoration turned out to be a contentious issue within the firm. "There were basically three camps," one person involved in the discussions said. "One said, 'We want him back just the way he was before.' Another said, 'We don't want him back under any circumstances.' And the third was somewhere in between. There is an element among the leadership of the firm that didn't want to say to him, 'You can't come back because of what you did.' At the same time, we were under no obligation to restore him to where he was on the financial side." Ultimately, the third group prevailed, and engineered the job offer that Starr received about four weeks ago.

When Starr left Kirkland & Ellis, he was at the top of the earning range for partners. In 1999, members of this group will be paid approximately two million dollars each. But in the recent negotiations Starr was offered a job at the bottom of the partner salary range, which is about eight hundred thousand dollars—sixty per cent less than he would have earned in his former capacity. Kirkland is renowned for its eat-what-you-kill culture, a legal term of art meaning that partners are compensated largely on the basis of their ability to generate business for the firm. Starr's recent offer would indicate that his former partners have some doubts about his ability to recruit clients the way he once did.

According to the same source, Kirkland & Ellis put several other restrictive conditions on Starr's return. These terms appear to reflect the firm's uneasiness with his tumultuous tenure as independent counsel. "He's not allowed to come back for six more months," the person familiar with the negotiations said. "And when he does become a partner again he's not allowed to give any more speeches. He's become a lightning rod, and the idea is, he's welcome to come back here to practice law but *not* to go on being a political figure." (Thomas Yannucci, the managing partner of K. & E.'s Washington office, confirmed last week that the firm had made a job offer to Starr. "Your terms are not accurate," he said, but declined to elaborate.)

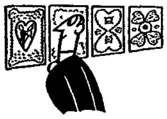
Starr declined to comment on his job negotiations, but he has been taking advantage of his time off by appearing on talk shows and giving speeches at chambers of commerce. He has been telling audiences that his immediate plans include writing a book about the Supreme Court and playing "Mr. Mom" around his house, in suburban Virginia, for a while.

Starr is in a very different position today than he was the last time he found himself looking for a job. Back in 1993, when Clinton's election forced Starr out of the Justice Department, an article in *The American Lawyer* described him as "the most valuable property to come on the Washington, D.C., legal market in well over a decade." It appears that this is not the case anymore.

—JEFFREY TOOBIN

RAG TRADE

A master of makeup and portraiture communes with one of his forebears.



ONE chilly afternoon not long ago, François Nars, the makeup artist and fashion photographer, visited the Metropolitan Museum of Art in search of style. He found it in the exhibition "Portraits by Ingres." "There's an arrogance to all these paintings," Nars said, strolling past portraits of the ruling élite in France from the last years of the Revolution to the Second Empire. "Arrogance is the key to style."

This fall, Nars, who is forty years old, published his first book of portraits, called "X-Ray," featuring riotously made-up models and socialites in outlandish wigs and hats, each posed against a stark white background. At the Met, he wore rumpled Helmut Lang khaki trousers, a gray T-shirt, a black Prada jacket, and running shoes. His wispy goatee and wide sideburns made him look right at home among the superannuated noblemen on the gallery walls.

Nars closely studied the details of Ingres's paintings, pausing before a portrait of Madame LeBlanc, a French noblewoman who lived in Florence. She wears a black gown, elaborately ruched across the bodice, with black satin ribbons decorating the wrists and a long, thick gold chain falling over her breasts.

"There's a little Galliano, or maybe even Karl Lagerfeld for Chanel, in this picture," Nars said. "And there's a bit of

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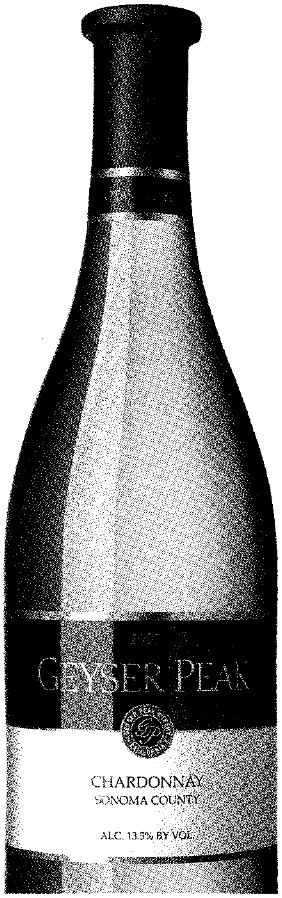

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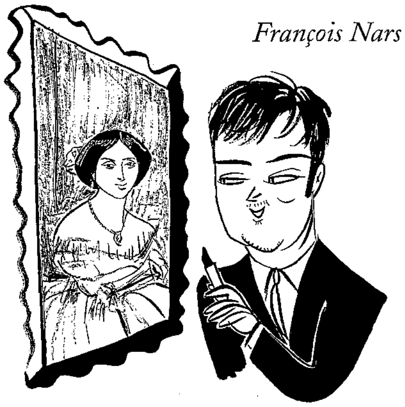
Susan Sarandon in her expression, too.” Cocking his head to scrutinize the rest of Madame LeBlanc, he added, “They all have fat hands. I think it must have been sexy at that time.”

Nars grew up in the French city of Tarbes, near Biarritz. When he realized that Ingres also came from the southwestern part of the country, he felt an immediate kinship with the painter. And he identifies with Ingres’s affinity for rosy complexions. “The color of the cheeks is a peachy apricot,” Nars said, stepping closer to examine a portrait of the beautiful divorcée Madame de Senonnes. “And it’s very, very matte. I have something very close to that in my makeup line, a blush called Passion.”

As a makeup artist, Nars is known for his almost formal politeness. Simon Doonan, the creative director of Barneys New York, says, “Certain makeup artists will spit on their hand and rub it on your face, or gouge an eye pencil in your eye. Nars is not like that.”

One of Nars’s pet peeves is the lack of verisimilitude in today’s period films, a grievance that he elaborated on as he considered the mouths of Ingres’s contemporaries. “Women *never* had very big lips,” he observed before a painting of Napoleon’s youngest sister, the Queen of Naples, Caroline Murat. “Today, there is an obsession with collagen. When I see full lips in period movies, I want to scream!”



François Nars

Just before the museum closed, with the guards poised to usher out the last visitors, Nars couldn’t help but linger at a ravishing portrait of Princesse Albert de Broglie dressed in a light-blue satin evening gown, her dark hair swept back in a low chignon, a triple-strand pearl necklace coiled around her wrist as a bracelet.

“To me, this is perfection,” Nars said with a sigh. “I don’t see anything today that’s as beautiful as that. The bracelet is very Chanel, very Karl—especially the gold clasp. The beauty of the supermodel doesn’t come close to the Princesse de Broglie. Her nose is like a bird. She had these tiny lips. If she were alive today, she would have trouble finding a good hairdresser.” —ELIZABETH HAYT

THE MUSICAL LIFE

Rise and shine, rock fans!

ROCK musicians don’t usually give concerts at four in the afternoon. At that hour, rock musicians are usually waking up, dismissing strange women from their beds, and ordering a breakfast of cheeseburgers and vodka. But when the Moody Blues came to town a couple of weeks ago they did give an afternoon performance. This seemed to mark an important development—the arrival of the rock-and-roll matinee.

No one who had access to a stereo and a bong in the late nineteen-sixties and early seventies will need to be reminded of the Moody Blues. Their album “Days of Future Past,” released in 1967, pioneered the use of a symphony orchestra to accompany rock guitars, for better or worse, and included fairly cosmic spoken-word passages (“Breathe deep the gathering gloom”) and invocations of the sun as “brave Helios.” Between 1970 and 1972, they had three albums in the top three.

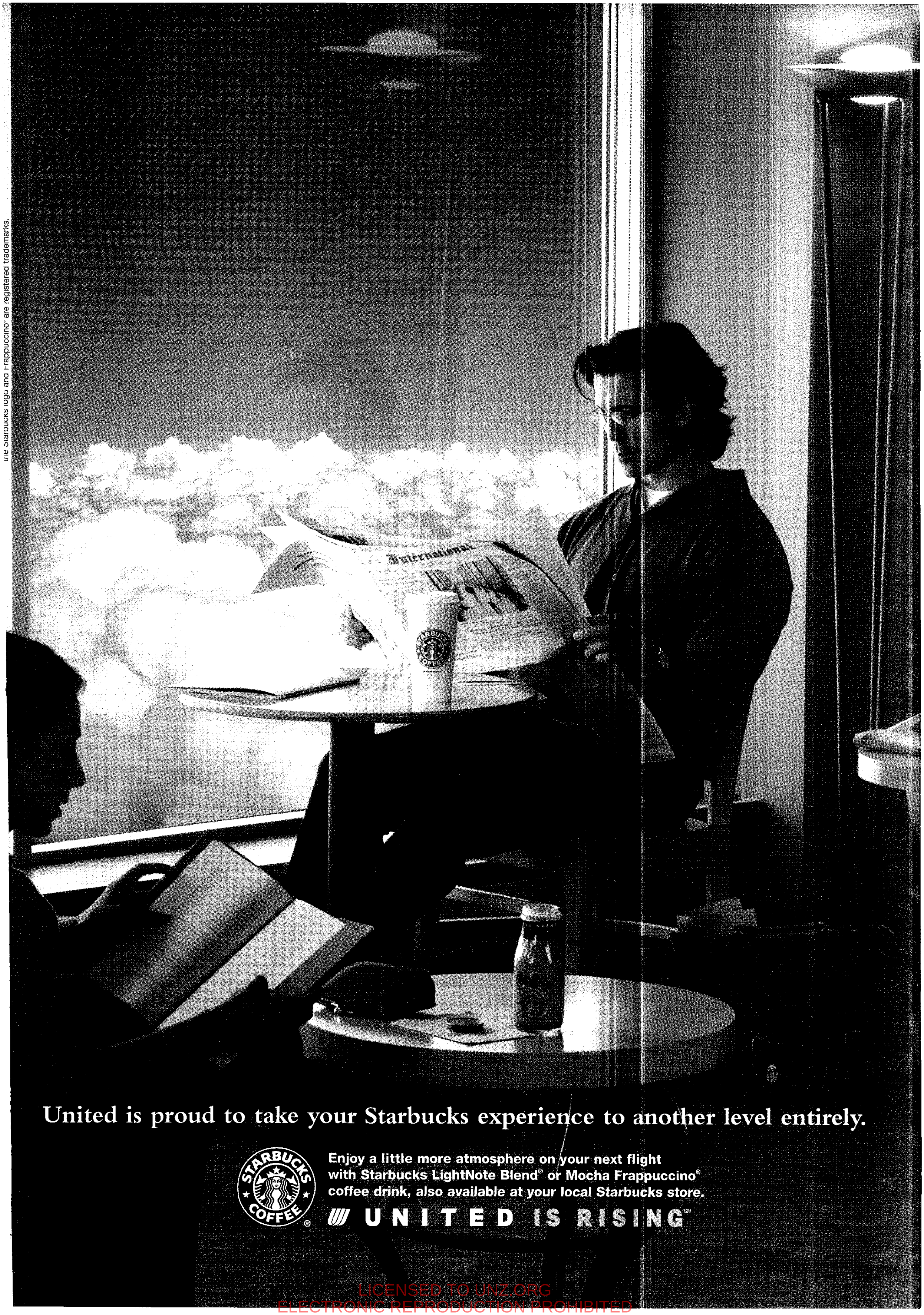
The scene outside the Beacon Theatre on the Saturday of the concert was subdued: couples stood around quietly, the women with their pocketbooks slung to the front, visiting-the-city style. The men wore khakis or jeans that were a size too small in the waist. Their hair was going gray; the women’s tended to be dyed red or rusty blond.

One ticket holder, Michael Goetz, of New Brunswick, New Jersey, pushed up the sleeve of his sweatshirt to reveal a tattoo of the Moody Blues insignia. “I first saw them in 1971 at the Felt Forum, with Poco,” he said. “They blew me away.” Goetz said he had chosen this afternoon performance because he had his four-year-old daughter with him. “It’s her first rock-and-roll show,” he said. Justin Hayward is the Moody who wrote the band’s big hit, “Nights in White Satin,” and Goetz told me that his nephew, who is six, is named Justin Hayward Goetz. Young Justin and his parents arrived a little while later. “Four o’clock is great,” Justin’s father said. “That means we can get him in bed by eight.”

The dressing rooms backstage at the Beacon are arranged on different floors, and are connected by a narrow staircase. On one floor, Graeme Edge, the band’s drummer, was trying to choose a shirt to wear. I mentioned that I had just talked to a six-year-old named after Justin Hayward. “Poor bugger,” Edge said. Up a flight of stairs I found Hayward, a tall, soft-spoken man with straight blond hair. He didn’t want to shake hands because he had a cold. “That’s the way it’s transmitted,” he said. Considering that this was the end of the band’s U.S. tour, he didn’t look too haggard. “It’s a way of life,” he said simply. “I find a gym everywhere we go. It’s either that or watch the telly.” On the top floor, John Lodge, the other main songwriter, chatted about his children, who are in their late twenties.

The theatre was only about two-thirds full, and, between that and the sluggish hour of the day, the prospects for the show seemed dubious. “This is so weird,” one person associated with the band said. “Whose idea was it to have a show at four o’clock?” But the audience responded to the band immediately, and remained completely rapt. Amazingly, people cheered when the band played songs from its new album, “Strange Times,” rather than slumping back in their seats to wait for another oldie. The stage lights reflected off row after row of spectacles, and the fans dancing at their seats were unlithe. But they didn’t look any sillier than people generally do when they are enjoying themselves.

Terry Rhodes, the Moody Blues’ agent, says he got the idea for scheduling a four o’clock show after going to a Beach Boys concert at that hour. “It was packed,” Rhodes said. “I started talking about it with people. I realized that the Knicks and football are on in the afternoon. Most of our fans have families, and it’s a lot easier to get a babysitter and go out to dinner.” After the show, I asked Hayward how it felt to be playing for people who were gray-haired and needed babysitters. “People love the music of their youth,” he said. “It’s such an impressionable period. We all understand the triviality as well as the impor-



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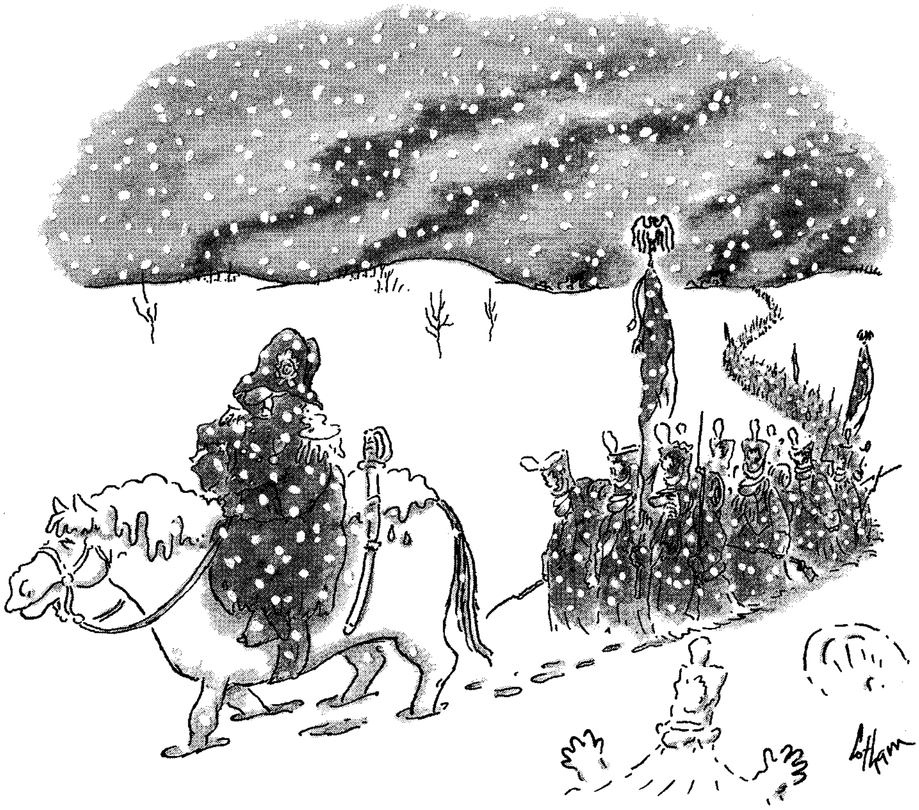


"He's moving his campaign headquarters back to Paris. He wants to be closer to the French people."

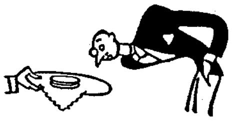
• •

tance of music. Sometimes you feel like a man doing a boy's job. But there's no better feeling than seeing the smiles on the faces of those people. That music means so much in their lives."

—JAMES COLLINS

TABLE TALK

In search of the real tortilla.



OYSTERS were once so abundant in the transparent waters of the Thames that nice people turned up their noses at them and considered them food for the riffraff. Caviar was once gathered in such prodigious quantities from the Great Lakes that New Yorkers used to polish it off by the barrel. These facts came to mind as I passed a Mexican restaurant, the Rocking Horse Café, in Chelsea, one day. A woman wearing a traditional Mexican checked kerchief was making ordinary tortillas in the window, turning them out with a handpress and a *comal* (a round griddle), for all the world as if she were on display at Bloomingdale's. It struck me that, however unusual such a performance might seem to a Mexican, at least New York can still boast of having fresh tortillas, which are becoming a luxury in Mexico itself.

I had glimpsed this latest form of gringo superiority before. Last year, on a visit to the Fonda San Miguel—a very good Mexican restaurant in Austin, Texas—my hosts took me back to the kitchen to watch authentic Mexican ladies making tortillas, delicious tortillas, the best I had tasted in years: creamy yellow, light, tender, soft, small, round, and fragrant with lime and charcoal and corn. Ricardo Muñoz Zurita, who at that time was the chef at the Fonda, told me, "We did a lot of work on the *nixtamal*"—the corn, boiled in a lime solution, that tortillas are made from. "We tinkered with the mixture of *cacahuazintle* [hominy], we changed the variety of corn, we went over the proportions . . . everything."

This is just what Mexico's tortilla magnates must have done when the privatization program of Mexico's notorious former President Carlos Salinas delivered the future of the tortilla into their hands. They pondered it, went over it, tinkered with the mixture of *cacahuazintle*, experimented with the proportions, and finally served up to the Mexican people the rounds of grilled cardboard that at present constitute the nation's basic foodstuff. No one protests. Does anyone remember that there was once a time when tortillas had a top and a bottom, and the thin layer that could be peeled off the top was substantial enough on its own to be stuffed, rolled into a slender flute, and fried to make the classic Jalisco *flautas*? Does anyone remember when tortillas did not crumble to bits if reheated? Does anyone remember when tortillas rarely needed to be reheated, because one of the rituals of the day was to go stand in line at the local *tortillería*, which perfumed the midday air for blocks around? Does anyone remember when tortillas were so delicious that you came out to the street with your warm packet of them wrapped in a thick cloth and as soon as you were home, without further ado, you stood there in the kitchen and ate one or two with nothing but a little salt? A few weeks ago, I noticed that the last *tortillería* in my neighborhood in Mexico City had shut down.

As a teen-ager, I gorged my way across Mexico City, eating tacos *sudados*, or "sweaty tacos," in the streets of Moneda; chicken *flautas* on San Cosme; beef *chilaquiles* (pieces of stale tortilla tossed in sauce) in the Chinese café on Rosales; *gorditas* (dumplings made from tortilla dough) with *chicharrón* (pork cracklings) on Ayuntamiento; tacos *al pastor* on Bucareli; pig's-foot tostadas in La Villa; tacos with *rajas* (green-chili strips cooked in cream) at the Guadalupana on the Callejón de Dolores; the cream-topped dish Mexicans call Swiss enchiladas at the Sanborn's on Madero, in the old heart of the city; potato quesadillas with chorizo at the San Hipólito gate; and the pork tamales with salsa *verde* sold by the lady who had a stand by the door of the Elizondo bakery.

From time to time, the memory of those banquets calls out to me and I ask the man who sells tacos from a beat-up van near my house to give me one with mole or *chicharrón*, no rice. It's not bad, but the critical missing ingredient is not the spice of my unbridled youthful gluttony or the artistry that makes the difference between a mole ground on a stone and a mole made from a paste

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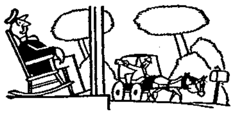
available at the local supermarket (we're talking about tacos sold from the back of a van, after all). The main thing lacking is the flavor of the tortilla, an absence that, thanks to the monopoly of the new, industrial tortilla, is eroding the very foundation of Mexican cooking.

In the meantime, my friend Javier Espinosa, who manages the Hotel Casavieja in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, and who always takes an interest in good food, tells me that there is a kind of family-run luxury inn on the outskirts of Comitán where a lady makes tortillas on a *comal*, over a wood fire, from real *nixtamal*, and patted into shape, according to the finest tradition, between the palms of her hands. I'm organizing an excursion to go taste this rare wonder. —ALMA GUILLERMOPRIETO

(*Translated, from the Spanish, by Esther Allen.*)

HISTORY SLEPT HERE

A couple of novices pick up the boyhood home of John Wilkes Booth.



ASIA CLARKE dealt with her troubles by writing about them. A few years after her brother, John Wilkes Booth, assassinated Abraham Lincoln, she sat down and wrote a sad little book about their childhood adventures. The most lyrical scenes in her manuscript, which was finally published, in 1938, take place at Tudor Hall, the Booth family farm, about thirty miles northeast of Baltimore. Asia and John used to go out in the woods and put on plays, she remembered, and sometimes John would throw himself face down in the dirt, burrowing his nose in the humus and roots, and rhapsodize about the "earth's healthy breath." On a Saturday last month, Tudor Hall, its contents, and its remaining eight acres were sold at auction.

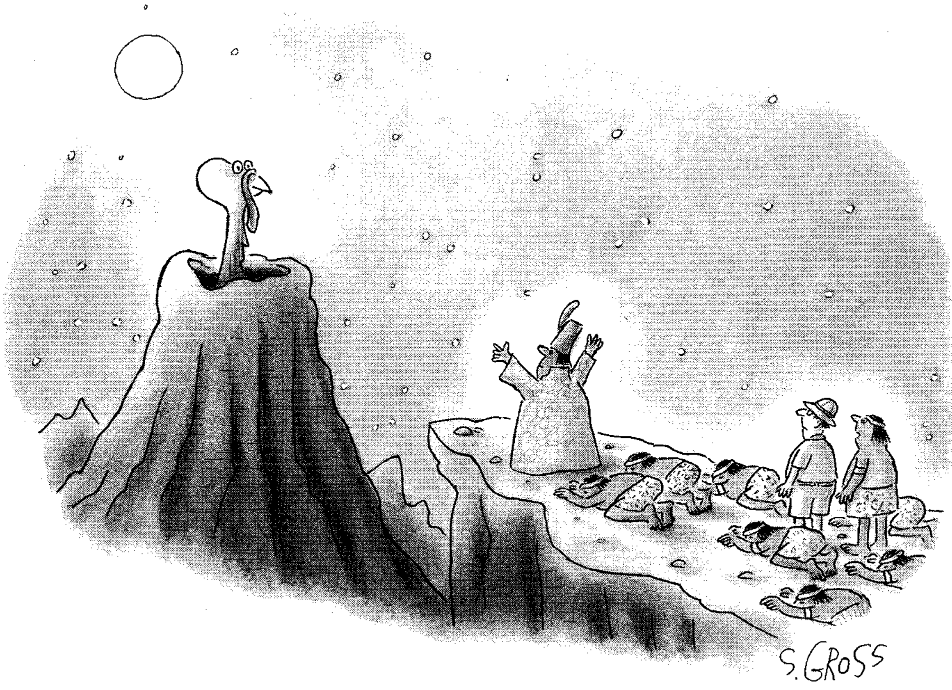
The house is Gothic Revival—it was built in 1847—and the atmosphere on the front lawn on the foggy morning of the auction was Gothic in the extreme. Rows of white folding chairs had been set up, and a woman who had been leading tours of the house for the past ten years sat in the front row weeping, afraid that some developer was going to swoop in and destroy the place. "I'm here to watch the rape of American history," one of a milling mob of preservationists lamented. Meanwhile, a gaunt, bearded man who said that he worked as an Abraham Lincoln impersonator loped along the rows of antiques and collectibles, looking for items for his Gettysburg shop. A man in full Confederate regalia, who identified himself as Major Patrick McHugh, of the Maryland Artillery, loomed on the porch, as if to intimidate anyone who might do the building harm. Major McHugh had attended Confederate balls that were held in the house a few years ago. (Some attendees got to sleep in Booth's bedroom.)

An old, blind horse wandered in a paddock near the house—metaphor material for the poetically inclined—and, over by a display of nineteenth-century prints, Christine Morgan was in a rage. Mrs. Morgan is the niece of the couple who had owned the house for the previous thirty-one years, Howard and Dorothy Fox. Morgan said that, after the Foxes died, last spring, an elderly relative who had been living with them was moved to a nursing home, and now her belongings were being auctioned off. "This whole thing is rotten," Morgan said, after she spotted her aunt's pots and pans amid the lots for sale.

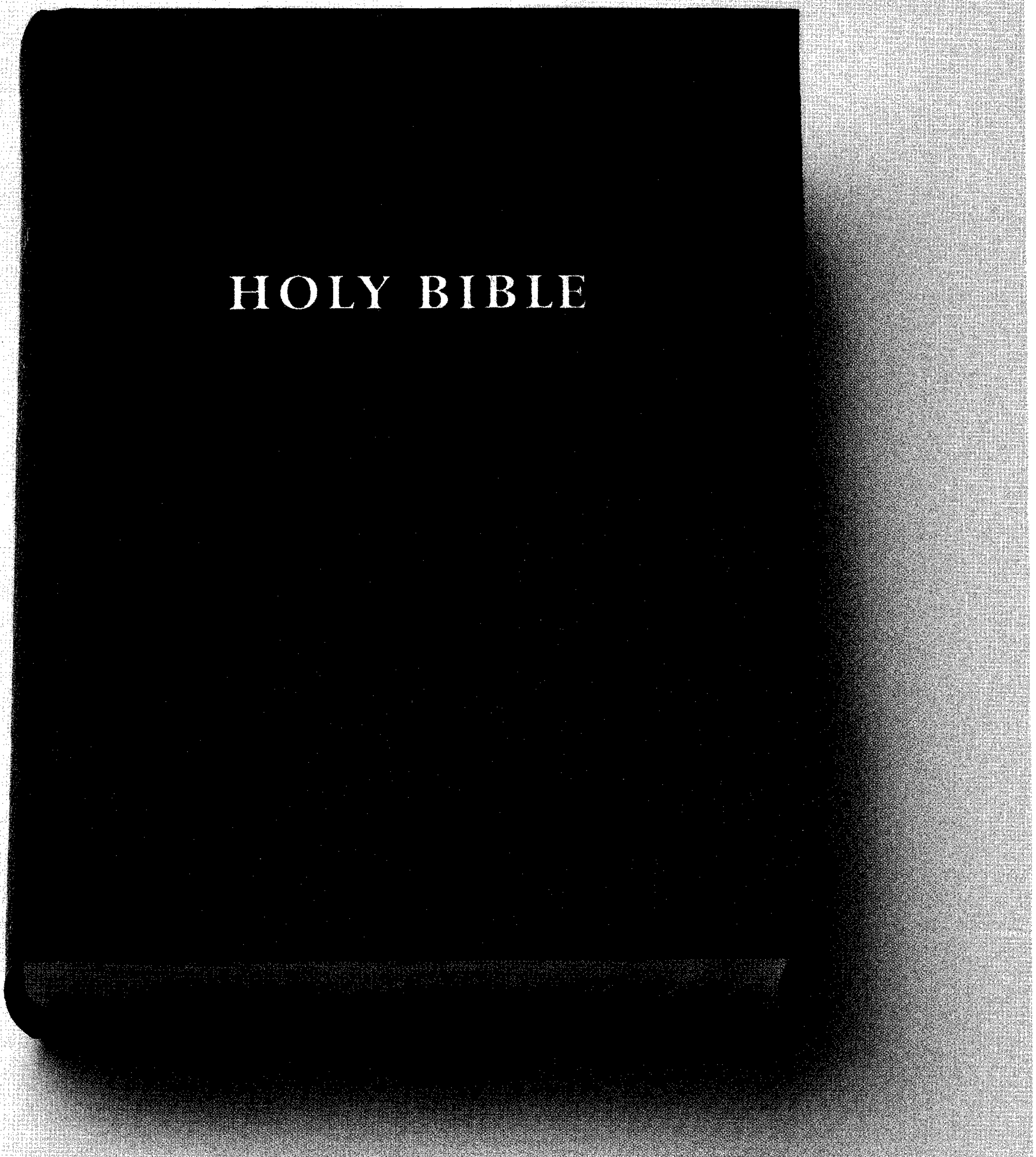
Tudor Hall is a wreck. The front porch is decaying, and, inside, the floors and walls are cracked and gouged. Upstairs there are six bedrooms and one antiquated bathroom, which features an outhouse-style toilet. The bidding on the house started at just under three hundred thousand dollars, and it went up to four hundred and fifteen thousand. When the new owners, a shy young man named Robert Baker and his wife, Elizabeth, had finished signing the papers, a preservationist approached and asked about their plans for the property.

"We have one child, and we'd like to live here and restore it," Mrs. Baker answered. There was a gasp from the crowd and some cheering. Then the Bakers, who own a commercial-landscaping company, were asked about the Booths. "We don't know the history of the Booth family," Mr. Baker said. "We bought it because it's a great house."

"They don't know what they've gotten into," one of the preservationists commented later. "They won't be able to have a listed phone number. There will be people stopping by to look at the house all the time. Even the Foxes got tired of it." Clearly, the place will always be "the Booth house," and never the normal suburban home that the Bakers envision. But the preservationists can at least rest assured that the Bakers are American through and through—young, good-hearted, a little naïve about the dark history that surrounds them, but floating through it all on a tide of affluence and high hopes. —DAVID BROOKS



"It's our time of Thanksgiving."



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LETTER FROM PANAMA

233,000 ACRES, OCEAN VIEWS

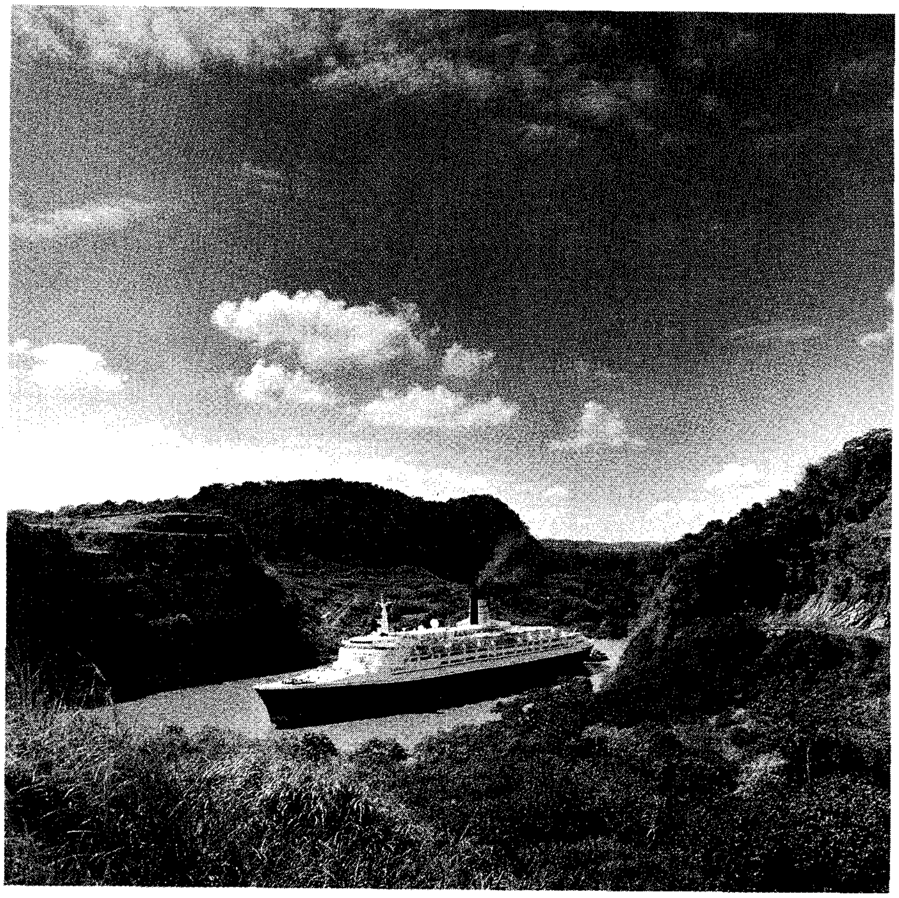
The former Panama Canal Zone is being shown to prospective tenants.

BY JON LEE ANDERSON

THE Palacio de las Garzas is a three-story, Andalusian-style building that stands close to the curb of a cobblestoned street in the old section of Panama City. *Garzas* means "herons" in Spanish, and since the early nineteen-twenties, when the building was renovated and turned into the residence of the Panamanian President, a flock of white herons has stalked delicately around the potted palms on the marble floor of the palace's small colonnaded interior courtyard. The herons can come and go as they please, but they apparently figured out long ago that they are better off in the courtyard than anywhere else in the neighborhood, where black vultures wheel over the redolent, grimy public food market just down the street, and drunks loll the days away.

The building that is now the Presidential palace was the residence of a Spanish royal judge in the seventeenth century. It was built on a peninsula, on one side of which is the Pacific entrance to the Panama Canal and on the other a gracefully curving bay. The palace faces the bayside quay. It is flanked by crumbling wooden jetties and derelict buildings with wrought-iron balconies from which laundry lines dangle, but it has a nice view of the new banks, hotels, and apartment towers that rise in glittering clusters of steel and mirrored glass across the water. The view is marred for only a few hours every day, at low tide, when the receding sea exposes an unlovely expanse of mud banks, rocks, and the rusting hulks of beached trawlers, and when the stench from the raw sewage that pours into the bay becomes almost unbearable.

The current occupant of Las Garzas is Panama's first female President, Mireya Moscoso, a short fifty-three-year-old woman with hennaed hair who has a degree in interior design from Miami-Dade Community College. Mireya, as her constituents call her affectionately, got into politics when she was seventeen and became the secretary and then the companion of Arnulfo Arias Madrid, an eccentric man forty-six years her senior who was three times, very briefly, the President of Panama. Arias was a racist and an admirer of Adolf Hitler. He was also a stirring orator, and a populist favorite in Panama. He put through some socially progressive legislation, including laws guaranteeing social security and women's right to vote. But Arias also made many enemies, and each time he assumed office he was overthrown in a coup. In 1968, only eleven days after his third swearing-in ceremony, he was put out of office by the National Guard, and Mireya accompanied him into exile in Miami, where they were married.



The QE 2 cruising the Panama Canal. The ports at both ends of the Canal are being expanded, and new hotels, resorts, and shopping complexes are being built.

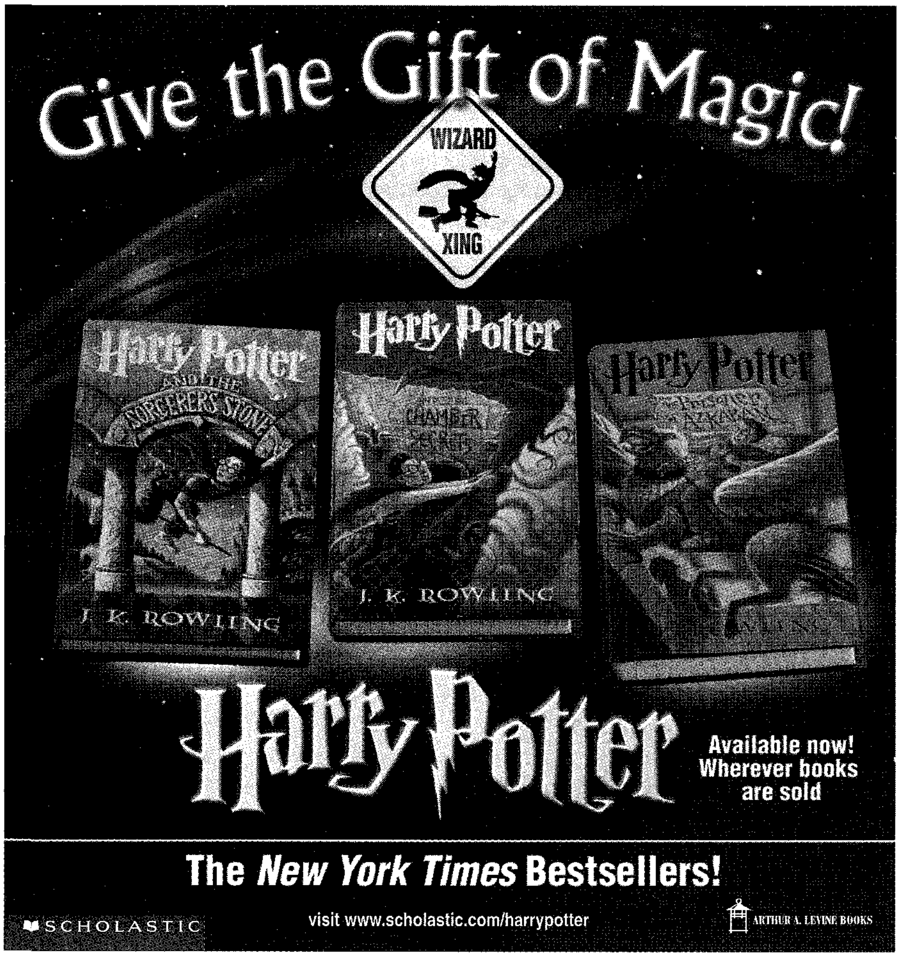
TINA HAGER/FOCUS/MATRIX

Omar Torrijos Herrera, one of the officers who led the coup against Arias, established a regime that was friendly to Tito and Castro, although Torrijos was neither a Marxist nor an ideologue. Nor was he, as a dictator, on the self-aggrandizing, brutal level of the real despots of his day—Duvalier, Somoza, Stroessner. His old friend Don Alberto Pons, a wealthy clothing manufacturer who is a director of the Omar Torrijos Foundation, claims that he wasn't even very violent. "You'll never find another dictator who killed so few people—two, three, four at the most!" (Most accounts credit him with several dozen deaths.) Torrijos was a handsome, hard-drinking, charismatic man whose folksy non sequiturs are still cherished by his admirers. "For a problem to be resolved, it first has to become a problem," he said. And, "The cause of whatever is bad is much worse than the bad thing itself." His most famous pronouncement, the one that is inscribed on his mausoleum, was about the long and troubled relationship between Panama and the United States. "I don't want to enter History," he said. "I want to enter the Canal Zone."

Since 1903, when the Republic of Panama was carved out of a contentious Colombian province, the United States has exerted a heavy hand in its affairs. The secession from Colombia was orchestrated by Teddy Roosevelt, and one of the first things the new government did was sign a treaty that gave the U.S. virtual sovereign control over the Canal Zone, a ten-mile-wide, fifty-one-mile-long strip of land stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific. The Canal and U.S. military bases provided Panamanians with jobs, and American servicemen pumped money into the local economy. Panama has never even bothered to print its own paper currency. It uses U.S. dollars, which it calls "balboas." The U.S. Army Southern Command had its headquarters in Panama, and during the Second World War around sixty-five thousand American soldiers were stationed there. During the Vietnam War, the Army used Panamanian jungles as training grounds.

Over the years, successive American Presidents have acknowledged that Panamanians wanted more control over their country, and a fairer treaty was promised. In 1964 the issue of sovereignty led to riots and to the shooting deaths of several Panamanian students by U.S. soldiers, but not much was done to assuage the nationalists until 1977, when Jimmy Carter and Torrijos signed a treaty that established a gradual devolution that ends this year, at noon on December 31st. "We are ready with pride and dignity to usher in the new millennium with our sovereignty fully rescued," Mireya said in her inaugural speech, in September. Since it has proved difficult to find important officials in the United States who want to observe the end of the millennium in Panama City, the official celebration of the event will take place on December 14th. By that time, the last U.S. troops will have withdrawn and the last military bases will have closed, and the government of Panama will control all of the country for the first time in its history. It will also have inherited some four billion dollars' worth of property, including beachfronts, virgin rain forests, airstrips, ports, housing subdivisions, military bases, and, of course, the Canal itself.

PANAMA withstood Arnulfo Arias's efforts to purge the country of black West Indians and Asians sixty years ago, and the population is still an unself-conscious mix of African, European, Arab, American, Chinese, and In-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dian immigrants. Santería, Catholicism, Pentecostalism, Bahai, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam are all well represented in Panama, and coexist in perfect ignorance of one another. The prolonged Yanqui presence has created its own benign syncretisms: Panamanian *béisbol;* mixed marriages; children named USNAVY, Edsel, and Alvin; and Spanglish place-names like Perejil (parsley) for "Perry's Hill."

Crossing from the unkempt chaos of downtown Panama City into the Canal Zone, with its clipped lawns and hushed air of gentility, used to be like driving from a Mexican border town to suburban Yuma, Arizona. Now, in some areas where the City and the Zone were previously separated by a fence, the two are seamlessly fused, although the Panamanians who have moved into the neat, austere homes of former American military personnel have made them more homey, with brick archways, bright colors, and wrought-iron grillwork. In one spot, where fields once formed a kind of no man's land just inside the Zone, a huge shopping center is going up, and Fort Amador, a former naval station, is acquiring a new look, as bulldozers tear out stands of old shade trees to widen the roads. Docking facilities at the fort are being expanded to accommodate the estimated three hundred cruise ships that come through the Canal every year, and investment is being encouraged for a complex of hotels, resorts, and shops.

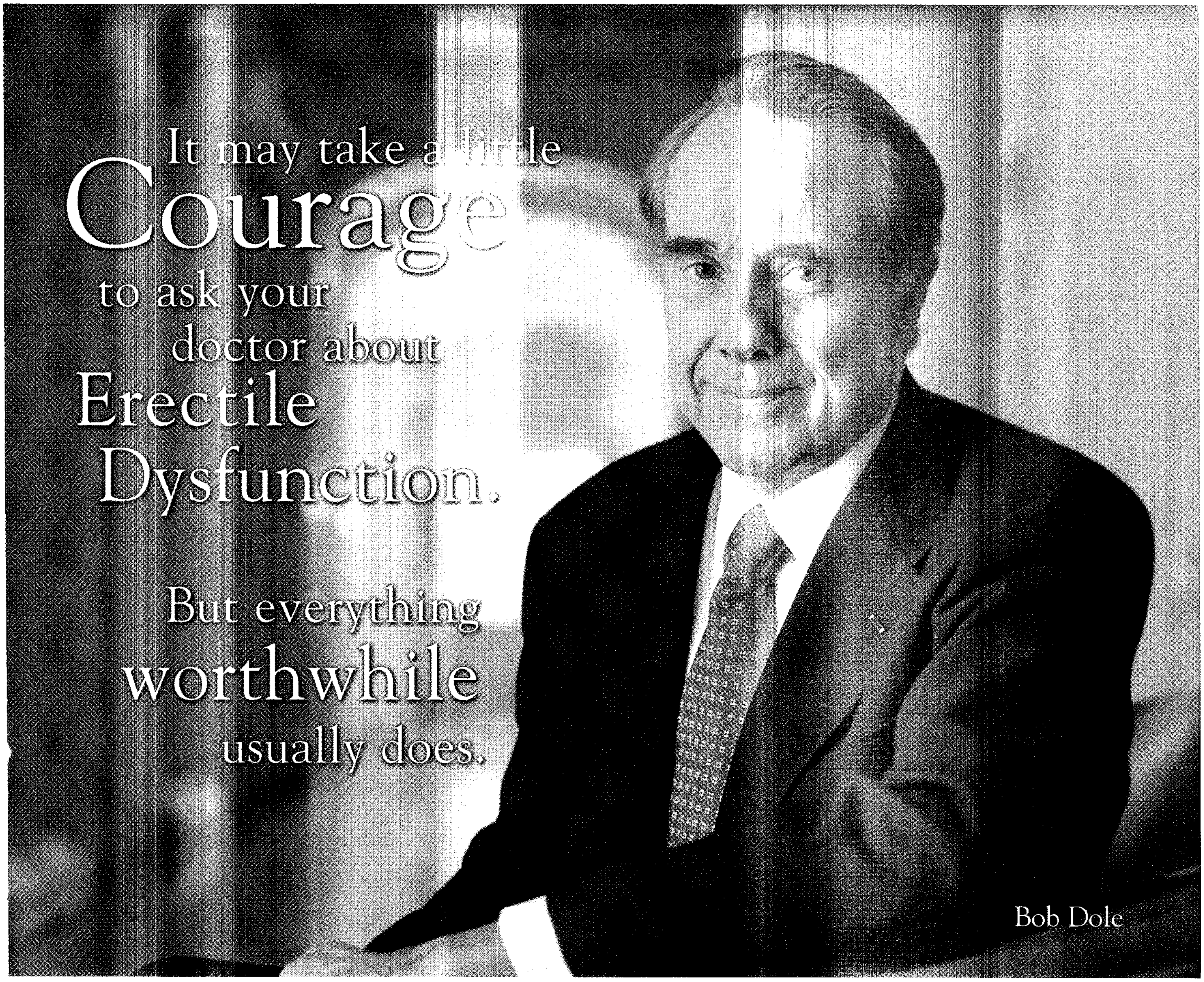
Outside the Zone, the changes reflect the last ten years of civilian governments, which have been very friendly to private enterprise and foreign investment. The military regime that ran Panama after 1968, when Torrijos and his colleagues overthrew Arnulfo Arias, ended in December, 1989, when the United States invaded Panama and then put General Noriega on a plane to Miami to stand trial for drug trafficking and conspiracy. Noriega had been Torrijos's intelligence chief, and he became the country's defacto leader after Torrijos was killed in a plane crash, in 1981. The center-right governments of the nineties that followed him went into business zealously, and the results of several years of unfettered construction are visible everywhere. New highways, bridges, high-rise apartments, banks, and hotels have already been built or are under way, and many of the city's charming old red-tiled or zinc-roofed tropical houses have disappeared. Most of the new architecture is slapped-up Miami Gothic. With two-tone glass façades and fanciful curves, some buildings resemble large portable boom boxes. In the ubiquitous new strip malls, which are bedecked with flamboyant green, yellow, and purple neon lighting, American fast-food outlets jostle Japanese electronics stores and importers of French perfume.

Middle-class Panamanians are well fed, carry cellular phones, and drive flashy four-wheel-drive S.U.V.s, but the country's rate of unemployment is around thirteen per cent, and Panama City's slums haven't improved much since the country was a dictatorship. If anything, there are more poor neighborhoods than there used to be. As Panama's rural poor, who account for about forty per cent of the country's population of two million eight hundred thousand, abandon the small agricultural towns and down-at-the-heel villages of the countryside, the population around Panama City is swelling disproportionately. Nearly half of all Panamanians now live there, and the spreading radius of shanty-covered hills shows the effects of the growing influx like the age rings on a tree. The newest communities are usually just a collection of shacks made from construction refuse thrown up overnight. Within days, the jungle around them begins to look chewed at and despoiled as people plunder it for firewood, or burn it to make space for their gardens. After a year or two, the *precaristas*, as they are called, sport larger, wood-plank or even cement-block houses with tin roofs, outhouses, and oil drums for water containers, but around them the jungle is gone, and the houses sit on denuded, sun-scorched hillsides that are littered with garbage, red with erosion, and crisscrossed by footpaths.

AND then there's the Canal, cutting through the heart of it all. The locks of the Canal are just concrete troughs with sluice gates and iron wheels and pulleys, but when one of those white cruise liners that look like great wedding cakes slides by in all its streamlined glory, with the green mountains on either side, you are suddenly aware of the sheer grandeur of it. The Canal was the symbol of American might in the Western Hemisphere for most of this century, and ever since the handover was negotiated—in the emotionally charged wake of the U.S. pullout from Vietnam—a vociferous lobby of American political conservatives has called it a feckless move, an irresponsible retreat. Emblematically, the withdrawal from Panama is, in fact, a retreat of sorts, from one of the most acutely colonial relationships the United States has ever sustained. The arguments against the handover are reminiscent of those made by the British when they reluctantly departed from Kenya and India. Opponents of the handover say that Panama can barely run itself as a nation, and is ill equipped to run the Canal. They predict that the Canal will be plundered for its shipping revenues, that maintenance and security will be neglected, and that it will provide an inviting target for international terrorists.

One day not long ago, before Mireya was elected, I visited the Panama Canal Commission. I already knew that—so far—the handover was running smoothly (because everyone with a stake in the future of Panama had told me so) and that more than ninety per cent of the Canal staff are Panamanian. Mercedes Morris, a young spokesperson for the commission, gave me the positive spin. "What you have here is a feel-good story," she said. "Panama is looking to the future." Annoyed with her spiel, I began to enumerate Panama's deficiencies, the most glaring of which is widespread official corruption.

Like most Panamanians, Mercedes didn't deny that there was corruption, but she said that it wasn't as bad as it had been "before," which is one of the many euphemisms for the Noriega period. A day or two earlier, I had heard a politician come up with the admirably circumlocutory "regime preceding the last one" as a way to avoid saying "Noriega." I asked Mercedes why everyone avoided saying his name. She sighed. "It's like telling someone you have genital herpes," she said. "It's a national embarrassment." The embarrassment stems from the United States invasion as much as from the years of Noriega's brutal dictatorship. Panamanians were exhilarated when Torrijos signed the



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"We do all our own parenting."

Canal Treaty in 1977, and then George Bush and the Marines came along and squished them twelve years later. Noriega's forty-year prison sentence in Florida (reduced on appeal a few months ago to thirty years) was a reminder of who was really Boss.

I first visited Panama in the mid-eighties, at the height of the Noriega period, when things were falling apart. The atmosphere of the place conformed to stories I had heard from my maternal grandfather, who was a civil engineer in Panama in the thirties. "It was wild country back then," he would say, after relating some hair-raising episode about his fellow-engineers. "Men would go crazy down there in Panama." By the eighties, Panama was the ultimate useful place, with its international passageway, offshore banking system, duty-free trade zone, maritime flag of convenience, and a passport-for-dollars immigration policy. It had the most promiscuous array of foreign embassies of any capital in the Western Hemisphere. Alongside the Americans, the Cubans and Libyans had embassies there; even the Polisario guerrillas, from Western Sahara, had a legation. So did the still renegade P.L.O. and any Latin-American guerrilla group worth taking seriously. They used Panama as a place to hide money, buy weapons, and trade intelligence. The arms trade was booming. An ex-Mossad officer, Mike Harari, with Noriega's blessing, had the market cornered. The place crawled with spies, and it was a reliable refuge for deposed despots. When Juan Perón was ousted from Argentina in 1955, he spent part of his early exile in the Panamanian port city of Colón. There, in the venerable Hotel Washington, Perón (a widower since the death of Evita three years before) met his future wife, Isabela, a young dancer who was touring with an Argentine night-club act. And in 1979 Torrijos gave the dying Shah of Iran refuge on the resort island of Contadora.

I met the Marxist mathematician and writer José de Jesús (Chuchú) Martínez in Panama. He had been Torrijos's personal aide and Graham Greene's sidekick, and was featured in Greene's Panama memoir, "Getting to Know the General." An American friend and I had drinks with Chuchú, and he became deliriously drunk, accused us of being C.I.A. agents, and stormed off. The next time we met him, he had no recollection of his outburst. Manuel Noriega himself seemed like a Marvel Comics villain. I remember hearing a story that had supposedly originated in Panama's international airport, where every day for several weeks empty coffins with Noriega's name on them were said to be arriving on flights from Colombia. Noriega had, presumably, double-crossed his *narcotraficante* accomplices in the Medellín cartel, and this was their idea of a death threat.

Noriega finally went too far, in 1985, with the gruesome murder of Hugo Spadafora, a handsome young Panamanian doctor and revolutionary who had fought in Guinea-Bissau with Amílcar Cabral's guerrillas against the colonial Portuguese, served as Torrijos's Vice-Minister for Health, and then left his post to lead a brigade of volunteers in the Sandinista rebellion against Somoza. After the Sandinistas seized power, Spadafora fell out with them and joined forces with the dissident rebel leader Edén Pastora in the jungles of eastern Nicaragua. But, increasingly, Panama was on Spadafora's mind. Not long before his death, I met him in Costa Rica, where he told me that he was building a case against Noriega, whom he accused of being involved in cocaine trafficking and other criminal activities. (Such rumors had circulated for some time about Noriega, but he was still in the good graces of Washington, and was even said to be—accurately, as it turned out—on the C.I.A.'s payroll. Just a few months before, he had been invited to speak at Harvard.)

About a month after our meeting, Spadafora took a bus back across the border into Panama, where he was picked up by two military policemen. He was beaten, stabbed, sodomized—apparently with a broomstick—and then one of his tormenters straddled his chest and carved his head off with a butcher knife while he was still alive. I was shown a sheaf of stomach-churning snapshots of Spadafora's headless body by his grieving brother, Winston, a lawyer who is now Mireya Moscoso's Interior Minister. The body had been found crammed into a U.S. Postal Service mailbag. Among the rumors that circulated was a Creole version of Snow White: the ugly Noriega had ordered Spadafora killed out of spite, and had kept his head because he wanted to wear Spadafora's beautiful face like a mask.

Two years after Spadafora's death, Noriega's chief of staff announced that Noriega had indeed ordered the murder, and the revelation inspired daily protests, mostly by upper-middle-class Panamanians in B.M.W.s. For a time, their lunch-hour, car-honking demonstrations in the city's financial district seemed almost quaintly festive, but then

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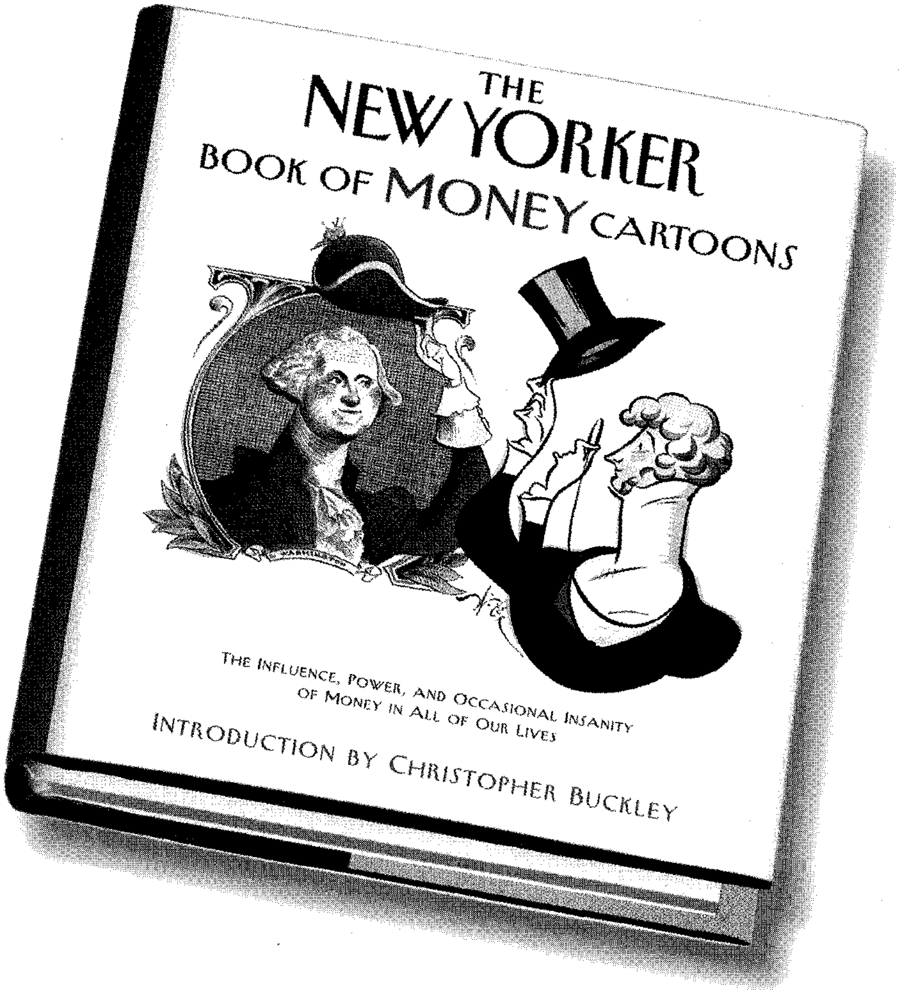
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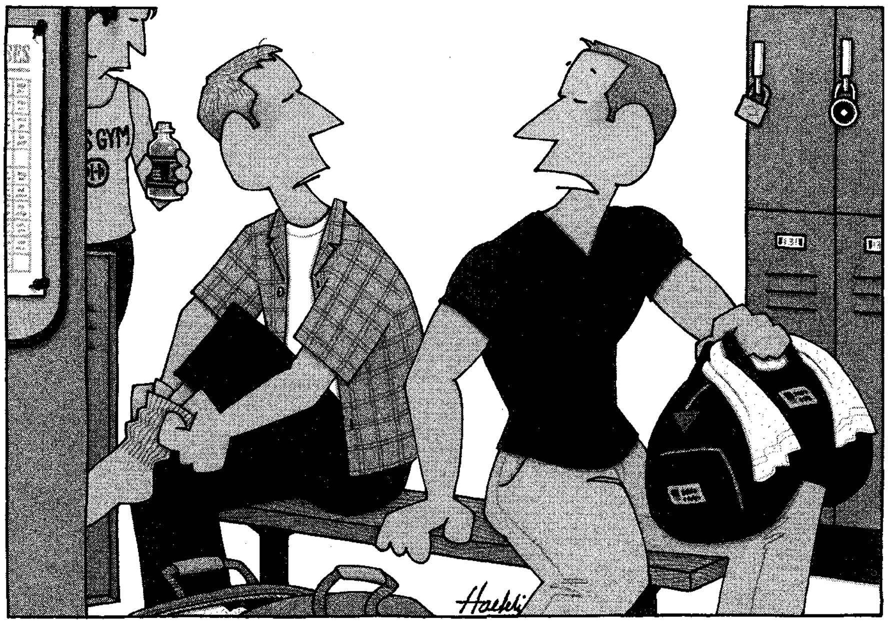
Noriega's black-clad thugs, known as the Dobermen, began hitting back and beating people up. Noriega lent an appearance of class conflict to the campaign against him by organizing mobs of stick-wielding vigilantes from poorer districts—so-called Dignity Battalions—who also entered the fray.

I saw Noriega up close at a small ceremony that was being held in Fort Amador in honor of Torrijos. When he appeared, unannounced, flanked by tall mulatto bodyguards, no one knew what to do. It was as if Darth Vader had crashed a kids' picnic. After a long, uncomfortable pause, someone shouted, in a strained voice, "*Viva el General!*" and then some of the other guests began clapping, but that died out quickly. A man stood up to give an extemporaneous speech, clumsily comparing Noriega to the heroic Torrijos. The attempt to draw a link between the two men was galling for die-hard Torrijistas, but it was revealing to see how important this kind of recognition was for Noriega. Afterward, he stood expectantly, a drink in hand, as the guests lined up to greet him. His face was deeply pitted, his black hair was curly and short; he had large fleshy lips and a great slab of a nose. His eyes were set so far apart on his face that he seemed to be watching people sidewise, like a shark. I managed to make my exit without shaking his hand.

In December, 1989, after an American soldier was killed by Panamanian soldiers at a roadblock, President Bush ordered the invasion, in which twenty-three U.S. soldiers and hundreds of Panamanians died. American troops surrounded the offices of the Papal Nuncio, where Noriega had taken refuge, and bombarded him with rock music until he surrendered, ten days later. Panama's Defense Forces were disbanded, and were replaced by a much reduced paramilitary police.

NOT long after Noriega was shipped off to Miami, I made a journey into Panama's Darién jungle, following the route of the Spanish conquistador Vasco Núñez de Balboa, who traversed the isthmus from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean in 1513. Nearly five centuries later, the Darién remained a remote backwater, inhabited by the Kuna, Emberá, and Wounan tribes, increasing numbers of land-hungry slash-and-burn ladino settlers, a few isolated soldiers at military posts, and roving bands of Colombian guerrillas and drug traffickers. Incredibly, the jungle had defeated the builders of the Pan-American Highway, which runs from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego. Heading east from Panama City, the tarmacked road soon ends and becomes dirt (mud in the rainy season) and eventually dies out altogether where it hits the green Darién wall that extends south over the border into Colombia.

To outfit myself, I went to the stolen-goods market on a pier on the fetid bay near Las Garzas, where there was a treasure trove of pilfered U.S. military items—boots, canteens, hammocks, ponchos, even uniforms—and began bargaining. Once I had my gear, I flew to Tubualá, a shanty-crammed Caribbean islet offshore from the Darién, to ask Cahuide, an ancient chief of the Kuna, for permission to cross the tribe's homeland. After a long, ritualistic hammock-conference with the other elders in the islet's communal meeting house, Cahuide said O.K. and sent for some Kuna youths who could serve as my porters. The oldest-looking of them, a muscular man of about thirty, said his name was Prudencio. He had an aboriginal face, and his black hair hung around his head in a bowl haircut. "I will go with you," he announced, smiling. "I am an adventurer, too." Prudencio had been to Panama City, he said, and to the Colombian port town of Barranquilla, and also to the federal penitentiary in Birmingham, Alabama. This last address was clearly the pièce de résistance in Prudencio's globe-trotting résumé. He had shipped out from Barranquilla as a crew member on a Colombian cargo ship sailing to the United States, but in the Gulf of Mexico the vessel had been boarded by U.S. Coast Guard agents, who discovered that its cargo was marijuana. Along with the rest of the crew, Prudencio had been arrested and incarcerated. After twelve days in prison, he was released, and he flew home—his first time on an airplane—free of charge. Prudencio grinned proudly as he told his story, and I hired him on the spot.

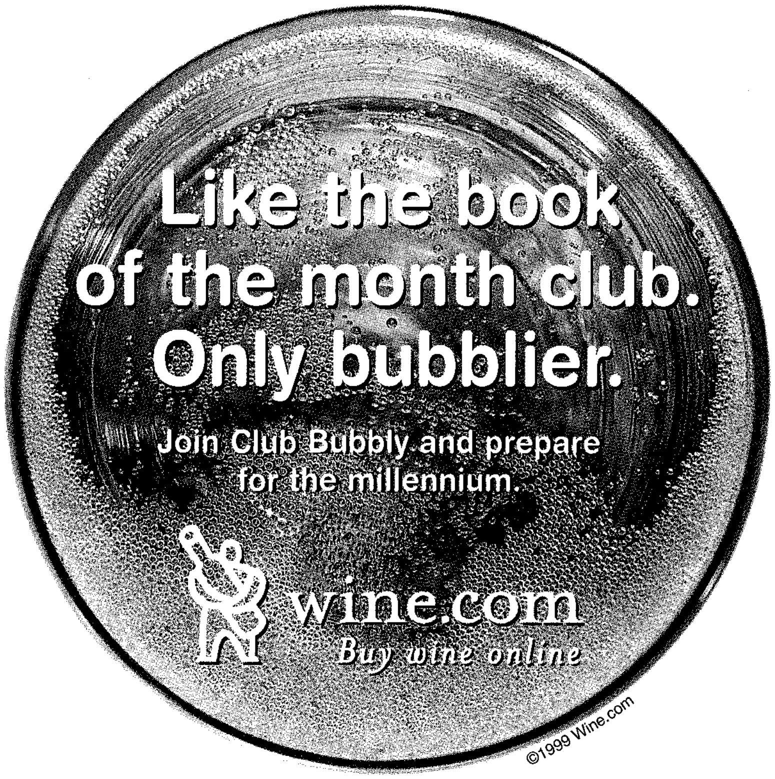


"Well, once again I find myself all pumped up with no place to go."

Our journey through the Darién rain forest took us from Kuna territory into that of the Emberá Indians, on the Pacific side of the isthmus. After a week of climbing over mountains and then poling down rivers, we encountered some Colombians. They were rough-looking illegal immigrants, squatters who had recently moved in and begun clearing land near Indian hamlets. A couple of days later, we walked out onto the dirt track of the Pan-American Highway, and there, amid smoke-filled forests—they were being burned for farmland by more poor settlers—we rested in a town where there was an airstrip, and where a detachment of American Marines had taken over the local National Guard garrison. The airstrip was allegedly a link for the shipment of Colombian cocaine through Panama to the United States, and the Marines were there to investigate and to deter any new narco-flights. We moved on, and climbed a mountaintop from which we should have been able to see the Pacific Ocean, but, because of the burning jungle, the coast was barely visible.

Darién's trackless wilderness has for some time been seen as a convenient buffer insulating Panama from Colombia, with its violent criminals, guerrillas, drugs, and potential torrent of poor refugees. In fact, Colombian guerrillas have passed back and forth for decades, hanging out on the Panamanian side of the border for R. and R., to buy provisions, or to pick up weapons. That was fine as long as they kept a low profile and nobody got killed, but now, because guerrilla and paramilitary activity in Colombia has increased and become more closely linked to the drug trade, and because the American military bases are being closed, everything has changed, and the security of Darién is a high-priority issue. Just across the border, in the Urabá region of Colombia, thousands of civilians suspected of ties to the guerrillas have been massacred by the right-wing paramilitary warlord Carlos Castaño, who says that he is going to start killing Panamanian policemen because they are letting the guerrillas use Panama as a sanctuary. Castaño's men have already made several cross-border raids, and there have been a few killings, too, though mostly it has been Colombians killing other Colombians. Even so, Panamanian policemen have been attacked and have fought battles in which they were seriously outgunned. Accordingly, they have pulled out of the villages nearest to the frontier, ceding a twenty-five-mile swatch of Panama's territory to Colombia's warring factions.

Two weeks after taking office, Mireya Moscoso visited Darién and promised to beef up the current detachment of thirteen hundred lightly armed policemen there, but the notion that such a force can ever be a real deterrent against Colombia's seasoned gunmen is fairly ludicrous, and leaves Mireya vulnerable to pressure for some kind of continuing U.S. security umbrella in Panama. In October, a merchant accused of selling food to the guerrillas was murdered by Colombian gunmen, presumably Castaño's; another merchant was ab-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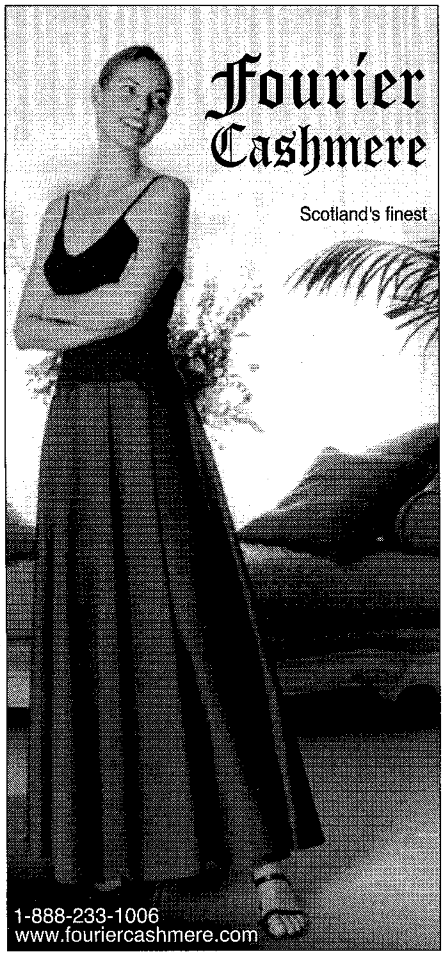
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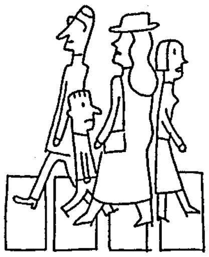
ducted; and on November 2nd, in a daring daylight operation, a group of Colombians posing as tourists hijacked two commercial helicopters during an excursion to the San Blas Islands. After tying up the pilots and other passengers at gunpoint and leaving them stranded on an islet, they flew off in the direction of Colombia.

Many Panamanians and United States military officials were hoping that Howard Air Force Base could stay in U.S. hands as the headquarters for regional anti-narcotics operations, especially since the U.S. was already operating more than two thousand surveillance flights a year out of Howard. But the U.S. balked at paying to use a base it had built, and the deal fell through. Howard was handed over on November 1st. A rueful American officer said to me, "The deal wouldn't have broken down if we'd acted more like traders and offered Panama some money."



Another touchy issue is the unresolved status of the unexploded ordnance—UXO, in military jargon—left over from decades of U.S. military live-fire training in the jungles of the Canal Zone. The Pentagon claims that it has cleared up most of the affected land (except for some seven thousand acres of mountainous jungle that it says is practically inaccessible), but Panama insists that all its territory must be made safe. If this entails continuing to sweep the jungle for live ammunition, the presence of American military specialists would, obviously, be required in Panama for some time to come. In public, Mireya is adamant that the day of American military bases is over in Panama, but there have been hints that some kind of an agreement might be reached regarding American "access" to Panamanian airstrips, and there are rumors about a defense pact. Meanwhile, Mireya says that she is considering an offer from the U.S. to provide Panama with contingents of National Guardsmen to carry out "civic action" programs in rural areas—building roads, schools, and clinics. As Harmodio Arias, Panama's Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs, said recently in Washington, "Panama hopes that the special relationship we have always had with the United States doesn't change. We think of ourselves as partners of the United States and we hope that the United States feels the same way."

CARLOS CASTAÑO'S claims about Panamanian policemen conniving with guerrillas to smuggle drugs and arms may not be true, but they are, unfortunately, believable. Graft, nepotism, influence-trading, and bribery have long been a part of Panamanian politics, and most of the country's past Presidents are widely believed to have robbed the till while in office. "This place works according to a different set of rules," a wealthy Panamanian businessman said to me. "You just can't look at it as you'd look at it in Spain or the United States. The outside perception of things is totally distinct from how the majority of people here see them. All the money laundering, the arms trafficking, the drugs and whatever—it all just washes off people's backs. It doesn't matter to them. On the contrary, they aspire to it."

Mireya inherited Arnulfo Arias's extensive coffee plantations, and she is an affluent woman who would appear to have little need for more money. Since assuming office, she has ordered investigations into several questionable privatization deals and public-works contracts that her predecessor, Ernesto Pérez Balladares, pushed through. Pérez Balladares sold off many of Panama's state-owned public utilities, including the telecommunications and electric companies, two maritime ports, and a number of valuable properties in the "reverted areas" of the former U.S. Canal Zone. Not least because several of his closest friends and associates appeared to benefit directly from some of these transactions, Pérez Balladares's zeal in promoting such business acquired an unseemly quality.

For the past five years, Panama's official campaign to promote private investment in the old Zone has been in the hands of Nicolás Ardito Barletta. A gracious, soft-spoken man in his early sixties, Barletta has a Ph.D. in economics from the University of Chicago and is a former World Bank vice-president. In 1984, he tarnished his otherwise distinguished reputation when he became President under Noriega, following an election widely believed to have been won by Arnulfo Arias, who had returned to Panama after the Canal Treaty was signed. Noriega soon forced Barletta to resign, but he was resurrected in 1995 by President Pérez Balladares, who made him head of the Interoceanic Region Authority, or A.R.I., the agency created to oversee the "commercial development" of former Canal Zone properties. Ports at either end of the Canal have already been leased by a Hong Kong-based shipping firm, Hutchison Whampoa, which outbid Bechtel. Washington conservatives like Trent Lott see this as part of a Chinese Communist conspiracy to seize control of the Canal, although such a thing is highly unlikely, given the multinational nature of the various investors. Taiwanese and U.S. companies also have important shipping terminals or port facilities near the Canal, and a large group of retired American Canal employees have bought an entire residential subdivision at the former Albrook Air Force Base. Kansas City Southern Railway has leased the historic narrow-gauge train line that was built by U.S. investors in the eighteen-forties and that runs coast to coast along the Canal. The notorious former School of the Americas, where the U.S. trained thousands of Latin-American soldiers and policemen in counterinsurgency techniques during the Cold War, is being converted into a luxury hotel by the Spanish Sol Melía chain.

"What we want to be is a little bit of Singapore and a little of Rotterdam," Nicolás Barletta said sweetly when I asked him how he saw Panama's future. It was obviously a pet phrase. But when I asked him about press reports that Mobil Oil had paid more than two and a half million dollars in "consultancy fees" to three Panamanian middlemen—one of whom was associated with President Pérez Balladares—to secure an A.R.I. bid, he reacted with a wounded look and assured me that he knew nothing about the intermediaries named in that deal, and had no idea why they had been involved. He went on to assure me that he was not corrupt and had never been accused of being corrupt, that he had his good name and the names of his children to think about. I started to feel a little sorry for him, but then he introduced me to two men he described as "important Spanish investors," and I began wondering about his judgment.

One of the Spaniards, Mr. Rosillo, was an obese, blustery man in a loud gold blazer. The other, Mr. Pujol, was short and wiry, and wore more subdued clothing. Barletta was giving them the full-blown V.I.P. treatment, which included a chartered helicopter for viewing available properties. The Spaniards were visibly uneasy in my presence, and Barletta kept our encounter brief. Later, he explained that Mr. Rosillo was an extremely wealthy Spanish-American businessman, an international financier who was very enthusiastic about investing in Panama. Mr. Pujol was a "major figure" in the Spanish construction business who often worked with Mr. Rosillo on "large-scale international projects." I soon discovered why the two Spaniards (Catalans, actually) had been nervous when I was around. Mr. Pujol, as it turned out, was Josep Pujol, one of several sons of Jordi Pujol, the President of the autonomous region of Catalonia, and a kingmaker in Spanish politics. Pujol's big friend and partner, Mr. Rosillo, was none other than Juan (John) Manuel Rosillo, who was then out on bail and awaiting sentencing for a multimillion-dollar real-estate tax-fraud scam committed several years ago in Spain. Soon after our meeting in Panama, Rosillo was sentenced to six and a half years in prison by a Barcelona judge, but he appealed, and at last word he was still out on the street.

MIREYA despises Nicolás Ardito Barletta, not least because his short tenure as President of Panama was made possible by an allegedly rigged election lost by her late husband. She has said publicly that "for the good of Panama" he should "show some dignity" and leave his post voluntarily, but Barletta has refused, and she does not have the authority to fire him. Mireya has been on the warpath about most of the officials she inherited. Her predecessor, President Pérez Balladares, didn't show up at her inauguration ceremony on September 1st, out of spite, since over the summer he and Mireya had engaged in a public slanging match about some of his lame-duck measures. These included the creation of a new Supreme Court chamber, which Mireya accused him of devising in order to protect him-

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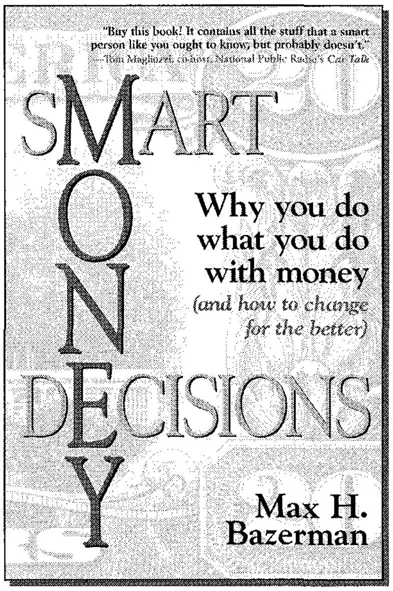

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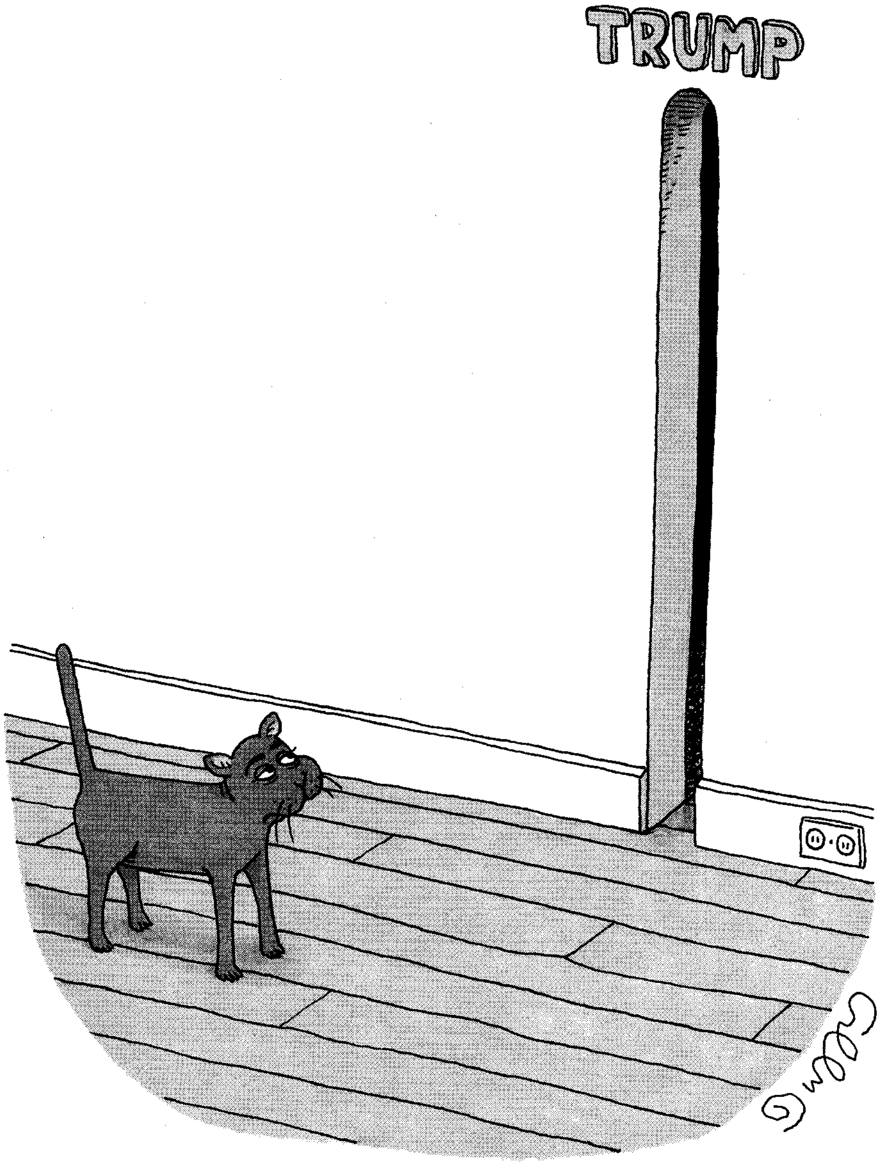
self from possible future criminal investigations. He also pardoned thirty-four convicted prisoners, including several drug traffickers and murderers. In August, his former intelligence chief, a young woman named Samantha Smith, admitted that, on his orders, she had provided special visas to a hundred and forty Chinese immigrants, knowing that they were probably using Panama as a stepping stone to enter the United States illegally. Smith said that when she questioned the visa handouts, Pérez Balladares told her, "These visas are already promised; you have to give them. I have my obligations. What am I supposed to do with my creditors? I have expenses to cover." Pérez Balladares has denounced Smith's allegations as part of "a conspiracy aimed at damaging the country" and his "personal image."

Mireya abolished the new Supreme Court chamber; she revoked some of Pérez Balladares's pardons; and she has opened inquiries into his appointments at the Canal Commission and the civil service, and into some of his privatizations. In a special bill, she slashed the monthly salary of Pérez Balladares's private secretary from thirty-five hundred to seven hundred and fifty dollars a month, and limited his security detail to eight bodyguards. She also took away funds budgeted for an arts-promotion foundation headed by the former First Lady. Such measures certainly make it look as though Mireya, who railed against official corruption and nepotism during her Presidential campaign, is actually doing something about it. On the other hand, she might just be doing some vindictive housecleaning. At the senior levels of government, the people around Mireya are mostly well-known, respected public figures. But she also has some questionable associates. Panama has very few politicians who can cast the first stone.



I asked a former Noriega adviser, someone Mireya has also called upon for advice, to arrange a meeting for me with Jorge Serrano Elías, the exiled former President of Guatemala. Serrano, his wife, and their daughter and three grown sons have lived in Panama since 1993, when he was overthrown after he attempted to assume dictatorial powers. He is one of the latest crop of political exiles to have taken up residence in Panama, along with the former Haitian dictator Raoul Cedrás and the impeached Ecuadorean President, Abdalá (El Loco) Bucaram. I met Serrano at the development office of a luxury estate and polo club that he is building on the outskirts of Panama City. He wore a gold Rolex watch, and a couple of expensive gold pens peeked out of his shirt pocket. He seemed eager to unburden himself to an outsider, a non-Panamanian. "Here, everything is about money," he complained. "At parties and social gatherings, all anyone talks about is *billete*"—money—which, he says, he finds "boring." Somewhat bitterly, he went on, "I've made some friends here, but most of them are friends only as long as they think they can make money off me."

The pecuniary interest in Serrano displayed by his Panamanian hosts is perhaps understandable, given the fact that he is a very wealthy businessman, and has been accused by Guatemala's government of stealing tens of millions of dollars in Presidential "discretionary funds" during his term in office. Serrano denied the charges as "ridiculous lies" concocted by his political enemies, and reminded me that he had been a successful property developer long before he ever became Guatemala's President. He added pointedly that the previous two Presidents of Panama had obviously agreed with him, because they had rejected requests for his extradition. He realizes that he made some mistakes, though. "I was wrong about one thing," he said. "It was a mistake to have carried out a political coup. I should have pulled off a military coup first, then dealt *el golpe político*"—the political blow.

I asked Juan Carlos Navarro, Panama City's new mayor, what he thought about the tradition of giving refuge to political exiles like Serrano. Navarro is a short, good-looking man in his late thirties who was educated at Dartmouth and Harvard. He is wealthy, and he and his wife live in a beautifully restored colonial home in the choicest part of Panama's old city, not far from the Palacio de las Garzas. From his top balcony, Navarro can look out over the bay on one side, and, on the other, he can watch the permanent queue of ships waiting to enter the Pacific mouth of the Canal. His elegant hardwood library is stuffed with books on American politics, including "Primary Colors," Dick Morris's "Behind the Oval Office," and some of the latest biographies of J.F.K. and Nixon. Navarro is politically ambitious, and it is well known that he intends to become the country's next President. "I have no problem with it," he replied to my question about harboring dubious political figures, and then added, "I've always thought of Panama as sort of like Switzerland." When I replied that I thought Panama's image abroad was probably closer to that of Casablanca, or Tangiers, Navarro scowled. "They bring money, they invest here. What's wrong with that?" But what if someone like Radovan Karadzic or the next Mengele decided to come to Panama? I asked. Navarro shrugged and said, "That would be no problem, either. I look at it as a kind of service provided by Panama to the international community. The world can think of Panama as a refuge of last resort . . . And if they live here quietly, *bienvenidos*."

At the end of Panama's American century, its imminent "independence" is already an anticlimax. The struggle for sovereignty and national dignity that gave Torrijos his historic heft, and that lent even Noriega's spat with President Bush a whiff of higher purpose, however skewed, is all gone. I listened to the U.S. Ambassador to Panama, Simón Ferro, addressing a large crowd of Panamanian and American businessmen. The youthful-looking Ferro, who was born in Cuba, told his audience, "The United States is not disengaging from Panama. Rather, we are reconfiguring. In the twenty-first century, Panama and the U.S. will still be friends and partners. What will change, I believe, is that the private sector will move much closer to the center of our bilateral agenda."

As it turns out, the Panama Canal is still something of a Yankee Trojan horse. The 1977 treaty contains a clause permitting U.S. military intervention to protect the "international waterway" from any kind of armed threat, and it is unlikely that the United States would relinquish entirely its military presence there. Nor is that what many Panamanians seem to want. "Here there is a reverential terror of the gringos' departure," Pedro Rognoni, a businessman and former government minister under Torrijos, said. "The best thing that can happen is that the gringos leave, and everyone sees them leave, and then afterward they come back again. And that is what I think is probably going to happen."

"What's the American interest down here?" a U.S. military officer said to me. "It's stability, so we can do business. Other than that, we don't care a rat's ass about them. We should, but we don't, not really." ♦

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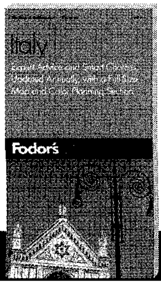

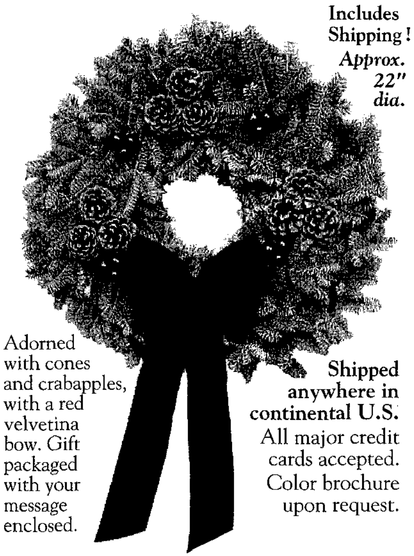

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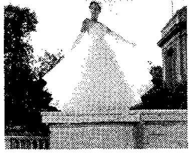

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KEITH RICHARDS' DESERT-ISLAND DISKS

BY NOAH BAUMBACH

Each month, the editors of Pulse magazine ask a rock-and-roll star to list which ten CDs he or she would bring to a desert island. Keith Richards selected the following:

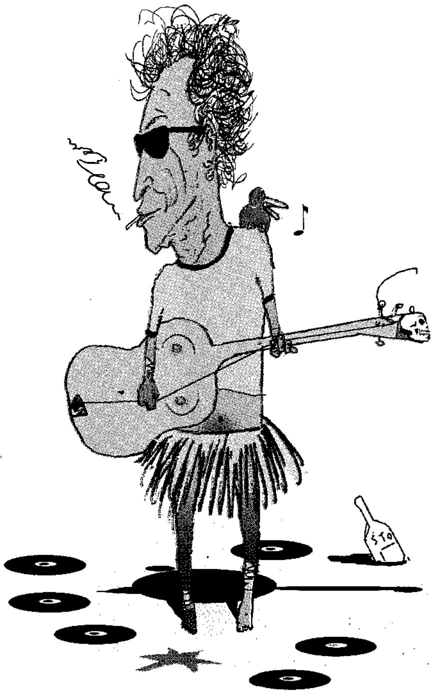
Little Richard: "Lucille" or "Tutti Frutti"
Beethoven's Third Symphony
Anything early by the Nat King Cole Trio
Everly Brothers: "That's Just Too Much"
Robert Johnson: "32-20 Blues"
Big Bill Broonzy
Louis Armstrong: "Pratt City Blues"
Blind Willie McTell
Carla Thomas
Otis Redding
Brenda & the Tabulations: "Who's Lovin' You"

• DAY ONE
Rigged a distress flag with me gypsy scarf, but it droops like Mick's jowls. While waiting for it to fly, played all ten disks. Ate a peanut-butter-and-Fluff sandwich the missus packed for me dinner and washed it down with me new poison of choice: Stoli and Sunkist. Smoked a Marlboro Red and watched the sun go down. Was lulled into me forty winks by the island's own music, the flop flop of the waves and the caw caw of the parrots.

• DAY TWO
Went combing for shells for me bungalow back home. In the uninhabited spots, one gets first pick, so to speak. Dragged back a whopping conch! Chilled out with me CDs. The sign of good music: if it's got some soul, ya know, you can listen to it over and over. That cat Little Richard must've had a desert island in mind when he wrote "Tutti Frutti." Scanned horizon.

• DAY THREE
Do I really need both Big Bill Broonzy and Blind Willie McTell? Thinkin' I should've put some Buddy Holly on that list, or maybe some Four Tops. Had a real craving for "That'll Be the Day." Spent the afternoon scouting for other signs of life and listening to "Tutti Frutti" on repeat.

• DAY FIVE
Can't get "Tutti Frutti" out of me head. Perhaps "Lucille" would've been a better pick. Opened me Big Bill Broonzy CD to discover me little one, Theodora, had switched it with the soundtrack to "Elmo in Grouchland." Cheeky critter. I must've missed it before when I was wrestling that monkey for coconuts. Been using the Shuffle option Patti showed me on the disk player to give those ten disks a new life they badly needed. The local birds and monkeys bop along to the tunes; one parrot in particular seems a bit more on key than Don Everly. It's me own Voodoo Lounge. Me Zippo ran out of fluid, so I'm reduced to lighting me Marlboros with two stones.



• DAY SIX
The bloody CD player got sand in it and it took the better part of the day to

clean it out. Pissed me off. Wanted something to clear "Tutti Frutti" from me brain.

• DAY EIGHT
Must remember to put the disks back in their cases: Carla Thomas and Beethoven's Third got warped in the sun. Just me luck, only had a chance to listen to them four dozen or so times. Started using "Tutti Frutti" as a shaving mirror. Man, the crooked reflection really makes me look like that Celine Dion bird. Next thing you know, like, I'll be banging me chest with me fist. Listen to Nat King Cole enough, you can detect a slight lisp. Ran out of Stoli. Have started mixing Sunkist and salt water for a kick even I'm not quite used to. Ten butts left. Horizon a bloody blur.

• DAY TEN
The distance from me chin to me groin is exactly five CDs!

• DAY ELEVEN
Tried to signal a passing ship for help—or at least some different disks. Played "Who's Lovin' You" on top volume and accompanied it with me Fender. Ship didn't hear me, man, and I blew a tweeter, so I ejected the disk and tried to reflect little rays of CD light at the craft as an S.O.S. The ship sailed on. In all the excitement, I trampled me sand castles. A real downer. Man, Robert Johnson is depressing: "I'm down this, I'm down that." Otis Redding's Mr. Pitiful and me all-black threads ain't much cheerier. I don't know if it's me ocean-water intake or the fact I've been smoking sand for a week, but I started to see Chuck Berry playing Kadima on the beach with Muddy Waters. "I got a gal named Sue"—I try to keep morale up, but me fear is that "Tutti Frutti" is inhabiting me mind.

• DAY THIRTEEN
Me ten favorite books: "Moby-Dick," "The Girls' Guide to Hunting and Fishing," "Tutti Frutti," "Gravity's Rainbow," "Tutti Frutti" . . . Ah, hell!

• DAY SIXTEEN
Tried to play the Everlys backward to look for hidden messages. Big Bill Broonzy is starting to sound too much like that little red Muppet monster. Broonzy ain't so big; I could whup him. Keep finding meself humming variations on "Tutti Frutti": "Loosy Goosey" and "Ittut Itturf!"

ISTVAN BANYAI

• DAY EIGHTEEN
Let it be known that this was the day I realized I could put all ten CDs on me ten toes. Makes me look a bit like a princess.

• DAY TWENTY-THREE
Aha! Discovered "Tutti Frutti" is inhabiting me conch. Little Richard is evidently *very* little and trapped inside me shell. Can't hear the ocean at all when I put it up to me ear. Turned in around five and me silver skull ring tried to bite me in me sleep. Woke up with a cut on me finger.

• DAY TWENTY-FIVE
Had a bitch of a row with some parrots who prefer Mick's solo outings to mine. Creatures are mocking me. Parrots singing "Tutti Frutti" like they invented it. I shut up one cheeky bird by stuffing his beak in the hole in the Everlys. A monkey took me side and I offered him Billy Wyman's bass position. Horizon slowly unravels.

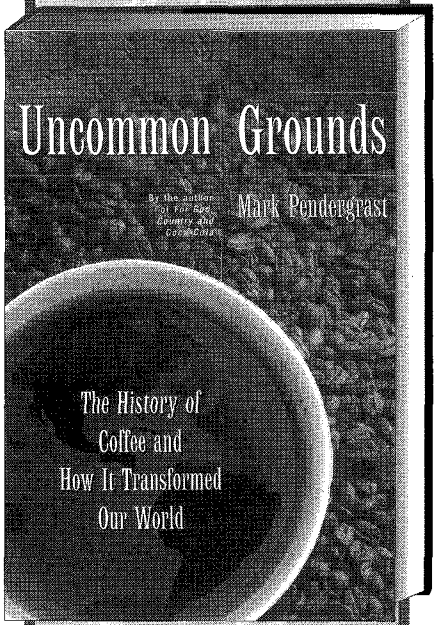
• DAY THIRTY
Re-formed the Stones with the monkey on bass, meself on guitar, a seagull on drums, and a parrot named Daisy singing lead. The bird's a real prima donna, but can belt it out like bloody Sam Cooke. Played that old chestnut "Tutti Frutti" till the creatures' bedtime.

• DAY THIRTY-ONE
Bloody bird left the group to go solo. Bitch.

• DAY THIRTY-FOUR
"I got a gal named Patti, she almost drive me batty." Not bad. "I got a parrot named Daisy, she almost drive me crazy!" The monkey and me are trying to pry wee, tiny little Richard out of the conch shell. Want to sing him the Patti/batty rhyme. "Tutti Frutti au rutti, too-ttay froo-ttay, au roo-ttay—"

• DAY FIFTY-TWO
"A bop-bop a-loom-op a-lop bop boom!" ♦

Small beans.
Big business.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1. NO PURCHASE NECESSARY
2. How to enter: All entries must be either on the official entry form or on a facsimile of a blank entry form, or by phone, fax or Web site as otherwise provided in this paragraph. Complete the questionnaire and print your name, your complete address, and your telephone number. Then mail the enclosed postage-paid reply card (or a facsimile in an envelope) to: The New Yorker Poll, P.O. Box 981024, El Paso, TX 79998. Entries must be received by January 14, 2000. The New Yorker is not responsible for lost, late, postage-due, or misdirected mail. You may also enter by dialing 800-246-1400 or via The New Yorker's Web site at www.newyorker.com. Only one entry per person permitted. 3. The grand-prize winner will be chosen in a random drawing of all completed questionnaires on or about February 11, 2000, by The Willard & Shullman Group Inc., and will be notified by mail or phone within two weeks of the drawing. All decisions by the judges are final. The grand prize is not transferable. 4. The trip will include hotel accommodations (double occupancy) for the winner and a guest for two nights in London and three days and three nights at Llangoed Hall in Wales, round-trip coach air transportation on British Airways from the major commercial airport nearest the winner's home in the U.S., airport transfers, ground transportation, meals (up to a specified limit), and tickets to the Hay Festival events. Additional transportation and other expenses are not included. Scheduling is subject to availability and blackout dates; certain restrictions may apply. Travel must be completed during the Hay Festival program in 2000. Total retail value of the grand prize is approximately $5,000, depending on point of origin. 5. Income and other taxes, if any, are the sole responsibility of the winner. No substitutions for the prizes will be allowed, except by The New Yorker in case of unavailability, in which case a prize of equal or greater value will be substituted. 6. All entries become the property of The New Yorker and will not be acknowledged or returned. 7. Sweepstakes is open to residents of the forty-eight contiguous United States who are 18 years or older as of February 11, 2000, except employees of the Condé Nast Publications, and the families of the preceding. Subject to all federal, state, and local laws and regulations. Void outside the 48 contiguous states and where prohibited. Odds of winning depend on the number of entries received. 8. Acceptance of prize constitutes consent to use the winner's name and likeness for editorial, advertising, and publicity purposes. The winner will be required to sign an Affidavit of Eligibility, and winner and guest will be required to sign a Liability/Publicity release which must be returned within ten days from date of notification or an alternate winner may be chosen. 9. Participants agree to be bound by the above rules and regulations. 10. For the name of the winner, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to The New Yorker Book Awards Sweepstakes Winner, 4 Times Square, 21st Floor, New York, NY 10036. Attention: Editorial Promotion, after March 1, 2000.

YOU BE THE JUDGE

Choose your favorite books of 1999

Dear Reader,

What were the best books published this year?

For the first time in nearly seventy-five years of publishing, The New Yorker, a magazine that prizes literary excellence, will award prizes for literary excellence. And we're asking our readers to be the judges. Who's better qualified?

The prizes will recognize works of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. A shortlist of five titles in each category has been prepared with the help of some illustrious writers: in fiction, Richard Ford and Jhumpa Lahiri; in nonfiction, Ann Douglas and Jonathan Harr; in poetry, Mark Strand and Susan Wheeler. The final decisions are yours.

You can vote by phone, fax, or E-mail, or by mailing the printed ballot below. But you can vote only once, and you must vote soon. The deadline is January 14, 2000, so that we can announce the winners on February 14th, the seventy-fifth anniversary of this magazine.

There are all kinds of book prizes: the Pulitzer, the National Book Awards, the PEN/Faulkner—and, of course, Oprah. But this is the only prize we know of that lets the reader decide the winner. So please vote.

SELECT ONE FROM EACH CATEGORY

BEST FICTION 1999

☐ **A STAR CALLED HENRY**
by Roddy Doyle (Viking)
A history of Ireland as told by Henry Smart, a philandering, thuggish good-for-nothing who somehow manages always to do good.

☐ **PLAINSONG**
by Kent Haruf (Knopf)
The story of a small town in Colorado—and the steady, uncontrolled sexuality that seems to run through it.

☐ **HUMMINGBIRD HOUSE**
by Patricia Henley (MacMurray & Beck)
An intensely felt account of being an American, trying to do the right thing, during the troubles in Guatemala.

☐ **A GESTURE LIFE**
by Chang-rae Lee (Riverhead)
A Korean pharmacist in New England is haunted by the atrocities inflicted on the "comfort women" when he was serving in the Japanese Army in the Second World War.

☐ **CLOSE RANGE**
by Annie Proulx (Scribner)
Grimm's Fairy Tales as reconceived in the high plains of Wyoming. Cow handlers, bar girls, bad boys, rodeo hands, and two cowboys who discover the love that dare not speak its name.

BEST NONFICTION 1999

☐ **THE ELEGANT UNIVERSE**
by Brian Greene (Norton)
How relativity and quantum mechanics might come together in a grand, unified "theory of everything."

☐ **THE BIG TEST: THE SECRET HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN MERITOCRACY**
by Nicholas Lemann (Farrar, Straus & Giroux)
The Educational Testing Service propelled the rise of a new élite, but with unbargained-for consequences.

☐ **OUT OF PLACE: A MEMOIR**
by Edward W. Said (Knopf)
An eminent literary scholar tells of growing up in the Middle East and the United States—a Christian among Muslims, an Arab among Americans.

☐ **THE IMMACULATE INVASION**
by Bob Shacochis (Viking)
Eighteen months with Special Forces commandos in Haiti, during Operation Uphold Democracy.

☐ **MORGAN: AMERICAN FINANCIER**
by Jean Strouse (Random House)
A biography finds much to admire in the bogeyman of capitalism.

BEST POETRY COLLECTION 1999

☐ **OF NO COUNTRY I KNOW: NEW AND SELECTED POEMS AND TRANSLATIONS**
by David Ferry (Chicago)
Four decades of translations, from Gilgamesh to Rilke, and Ferry's own classically lucid poetry.

☐ **VITA NOVA**
by Louise Glück (Ecco)
A book-length sequence on death, rebirth, and the end of love, weaving together myth and autobiography.

☐ **THE CONSTRUCTOR**
by John Koethe (HarperFlamingo/HarperCollins)
A philosopher's meditation—evocative of Ashbery and Stevens—on the value of consciousness.

☐ **POEMS**
by J.H. Prynne (Bloodaxe/Dufour Editions)
Thirty years of poetry by a Cambridge don linking the High Modernists with the Romantic tradition.

☐ **THE PILOT STAR ELEGIES**
by Sherod Santos (Norton)
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THE CULTURE INDUSTRY

DR. ENTERTAINMENT

Do C.E.O.s really need Michael Wolf?

BY KURT ANDERSEN

MICHAEL J. WOLF has the appearance and demeanor of a physician to the well-to-do: a youngish, slightly graying Upper East Side specialist, a pediatrician, maybe, or a psychiatrist. He is trim and dapper and sincere and prosperous-looking, radiating both extreme confidence and a reassuring deference. His manner, like that of a busy doctor, politely suggests that he knows a lot, definitely more than you do, and that although he doesn't have any time to waste, he's happy to use his knowledge to help you.

Wolf is a management consultant to the entertainment and media industries, and he works at the firm of Booz, Allen & Hamilton. His roster of former and current clients includes Ted Turner and Sumner Redstone, Universal, Time Warner, Hearst, News Corporation, Bertelsmann, MTV, NBC, the N.F.L., and the N.B.A. He is certainly the most well-known person in his field, and perhaps the most highly regarded. His success is a function of fortuitous timing, and of his own shrewdness in exploiting the moment. In the late eighties, he saw that the infotainment businesses were consolidating, expanding, and, as a result of new technologies, experiencing a variously hopeful and panicked gold-rush hysteria. He saw that conditions were ideal to begin selling calm, clear-eyed, buttoned-down advice about how to cope with growth, and with the new age of home video, cable TV, and the Internet.

At 7:35 one morning earlier this year, Wolf stepped into a conference room at Booz, Allen's Manhattan offices to join three colleagues, all of them, like him, white men dressed in conservative ties and white shirts. The three younger colleagues were there to brief Wolf, the "practice leader," on the team's work for a record company. (The recording industry, more than any other, is being discombobulated by new technology. If music can be downloaded at home off the Internet, who needs record stores?)

Wolf declined the catered pastries in favor of an apple he'd brought from home. (He also carries his own snack bags of carrot sticks to meetings outside the office, and doesn't drink alcohol or coffee.) The team's discussion concerned merchandising—CD-pricing logic, promotional "incentive" payments by record companies to stores—and how to persuade the client to take their advice.

"What we baked into this program," one of the junior consultants said of a new pricing scheme they'd drafted for the client, "is significant volume discounts."

"Everyone at the company agrees with the implementation we talked about," another associate said. "It looks reasonably implementable."

"We met yesterday" with executives at the client company, the first junior consultant said, "and we got some pushback on the new pricing"—"pushback" is their word for "disagreement"—"from some of the label guys. They're terrified long-term."

Someone suggested that they gather the heads of the company's labels for a Booz, Allen tutorial in distribution. Wolf shook his head. "The last thing you want to do is get all the label guys in the same room. That would be a disaster." In other words, the clients might get riled up, and Wolf's job is to keep them calm and rational. The meeting broke up when it was time for Wolf to give a radio interview.

Until recently, Wolf has been a background figure in the entertainment and media businesses, familiar only to the

"In the same way people used to quote Scripture they're now quoting 'Seinfeld,'" Wolf says. Photograph by Antoine Le Grand.

cognoscenti. But, after a decade spent advising the glamorous executives of glamorous companies on how to fix their unglamorous strategic problems, Wolf has entered the public realm himself. Earlier this year, he published a book, "The Entertainment Economy: How Mega-Media Forces Are Transforming Our Lives," and he has worked hard to promote it. The book has two incontrovertible theses. First, that because Americans now consider "fun as an entitlement," a diagnosis Wolf makes without judgment, larger and larger swaths of life can be profitably understood as forms of entertainment—not just TV and music and journalism but retailing and politics and fast food and automobiles. The second idea, which is even more of a contemporary commonplace, is that virtually everything—not just movies and magazines and artists but also cable channels and studios and entire corporations—should be considered brands.

When I asked Wolf why he published the book, he was suddenly at a loss for words. "The main reason was because a lot of the things that I talk about in the book are . . . Let me start over again." Then he hemmed and hawed diplomatically, since he couldn't very well say he wrote it (or, rather, conscripted Booz, Allen employees to assemble research and hired a professional writer to turn his rough drafts into finished prose) in order to reveal the interesting secrets of his clients, or because he figured book buyers would want to spend twenty-five dollars to get the same advice for which a corporation pays him two hundred thousand dollars a month, or even because he was tired of working for household names and not being famous himself. "He realizes that you've got to *personalize* the *brand*," one of his colleagues explained to me. So the book is a means of creating and promoting the Michael Wolf brand to a mass audience beyond his élite client pool, whose own brands he helps to promote to the mass audience.

This puts Wolf in a tricky position. Although he wants wider renown and respect, he's hesitant to boast about specific accomplishments. Professional etiquette won't permit him to claim credit, for example, for CNBC's successful expansion onto the Internet, or for convincing Viacom to invest more in its Nickelodeon channel, or for the ratings turnaround of MTV. After the week I spent sitting in on strategy meetings that Wolf conducted with his Booz, Allen partners and teams of young M.B.A. foot soldiers, I called to ask if he had taken on any consulting projects since we'd last spoken. "New engagements?" he replied, using his consulting term of art. "Well, people are always asking my advice. I'm flying over to Germany next week to talk to the head of a major media company." Another time, he referred unselfconsciously to "all the moguls I deal with." He wants the civilian world to be impressed, but he must be discreet, so he tends to name-drop generically.

But what advice do the power brokers seek? What exactly does a big-time management consultant do? From the outside, Wolf's life resembles an investment banker's—at his desk in a suit on Park Avenue every morning by 7:30, seldom home before 9 P.M., in Palo Alto or London several days a week, a relentless stream of urgent phone calls to and from moguls and their sub-moguls. But when I suggested that he is the consulting industry's version of the mergers-and-acquisitions whiz Steven Rattner, Wolf twisted up his face, as if he'd been accused of something a little unwholesome. He pointed out that what he does "is not about chitchatting with C.E.O.s. Investment bankers can do that." He noted, with some pride, that he earns substantially less than his investment-banker peers, in the low seven figures. (This income disparity, he believes, indicates that what he does is nobler than mere deal-making.) The job of the M. & A. swashbuckler, motivated strictly by fees based on a percentage of any deal, is to persuade his C.E.O. client to buy Company X or sell out to Company Y. "*My* job," Wolf said, "is to give them the *right* answer. It may not necessarily be the answer they want to hear—and, in fact, most of the time it isn't the answer they want to hear."

Unlike the overwhelming majority of the two hundred consultants who work under him at Booz, Allen, Wolf does

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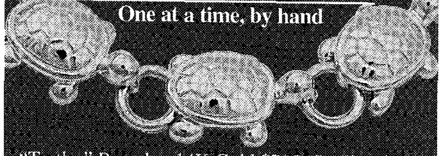

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not have an M.B.A. Nor did he have any deep experience in the field before he set himself up as an expert. After graduating from Columbia, he said, "I did marketing for one of the Hollywood studios, and then I went to Europe, where I worked in financial services, doing marketing—"

Which studio? I asked.

"I worked for an ad agency in Miami," he paused to explain, that had Paramount as one of its clients.

Nor is he the sort of charismatic visionary who changes people's minds by the sheer force of his presence. He is slightly built and courtly, and has none of the ferocious, fixed-eye-contact enthusiasm of the hard-sell mesmerizer. Instead, what Wolf had when he arrived at Booz, Allen, in 1989, was perfect breeding for the industry—his father is an investment adviser, his mother, Jeanne Wolf, has been a producer and an on-air correspondent for "Entertainment Tonight" and the E! entertainment channel—as well as the good fortune to arrive at the beginning of the digital revolution. "Technology is going to change my clients' businesses," he said. "The ground is moving underneath these people. It really is. It's shifting all the time." He smiled, like a successful trial lawyer talking about the glut of tort litigation. Until Wolf got into the business, Booz, Allen's entertainment-and-media practice was puny; today, he and his consultants bring in a hundred million dollars a year, about a fifth of the firm's commercial revenues.

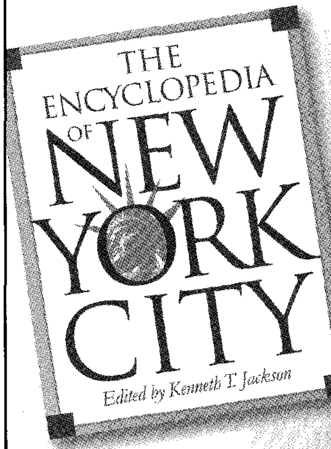
Wolf also understood that the men and women who create cable-TV empires and record companies tend to operate by hunch and instinct, and aren't predisposed to pore over numbers, draft five-year plans, or systematically scrutinize P. & L.s and operating doctrines. So Wolf and his consultants function as their blue-chip rent-a-nerds.

"Eighty per cent of business decisions are intuition," one C.E.O. who has worked with Wolf told me. "There's a false security that by hiring a consultant you're going to have analysis that will allow you to make the right decision." The main reason Wolf does so well, according to this executive, is that he is adept at both number-crunching and the more touchy-feely forms of executive support. The same client said, "Michael Wolf was very good with me—calling, having lunch, listening." Although Wolf's clients all agree that he and his teams are smart and hardworking, none of them could mention any specific, indispensable new idea or approach that the consultants had provided. "It validates and puts detail on what you already know," Anthea Disney, an executive vice-president of News Corporation, said of consultants generally. "It's always nice to have what you think is true validated. But I don't think we learned tremendous things from them. I find this notion of the consultant as the supremely knowledgeable person idiotic. It's offensive that people who are outsiders are anointed gurus of the media business. They look at your business from the outside, and they make judgments they may not be equipped to make."

At a question-and-answer appearance at the W Hotel, in Manhattan, to promote "The Entertainment Economy," Wolf's interlocutor, the News Corporation book publisher and television host Judith Regan, asked him, "What do your clients need to do?" And he replied, "*Make hits.*" It reminded me of the story of the know-it-all explaining to the comedian how easy the comedian's job is ("You know, it's just 'Hello ladies and gentlemen, joke, joke, joke, where are you from, joke, joke, joke, you've been a great audience, joke, joke,' applause").

But Wolf wasn't kidding. A few years ago, when he summarized his team's findings to the executives of the Nickelodeon cable channel, he told them that the way for Nick to grow even more successful was by making hits, and owning those hits. The recommendation, in the view of more than one Nickelodeon executive at the time, was not so much obvious as it was wrong, since the most successful cable channels—MTV, CNN, E!—are, in fact, not driven by individual hits.

To buttress their argument that Nickelodeon needed to concentrate more on creating hit shows, the Booz, Allen consultants told the executives that the channel's new rival, the Cartoon Network, was about to have a big hit with its remake of the animated series "Jonny Quest." Some years earlier, Wolf and Booz, Allen had finished an engage-



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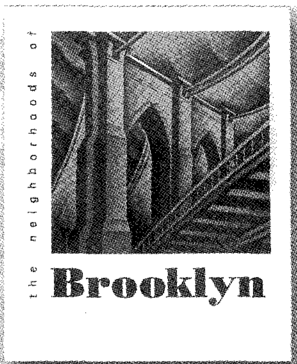

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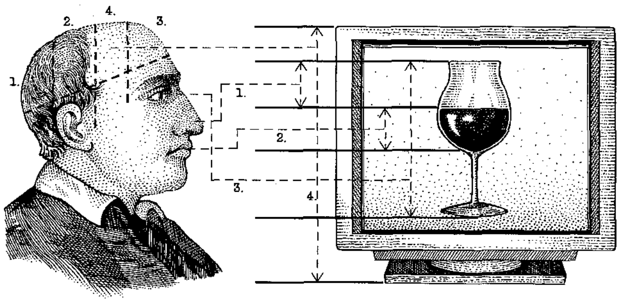

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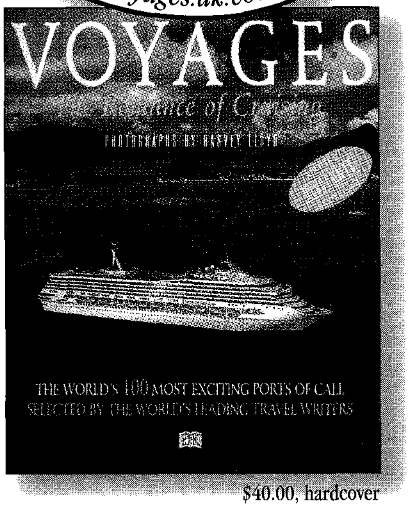
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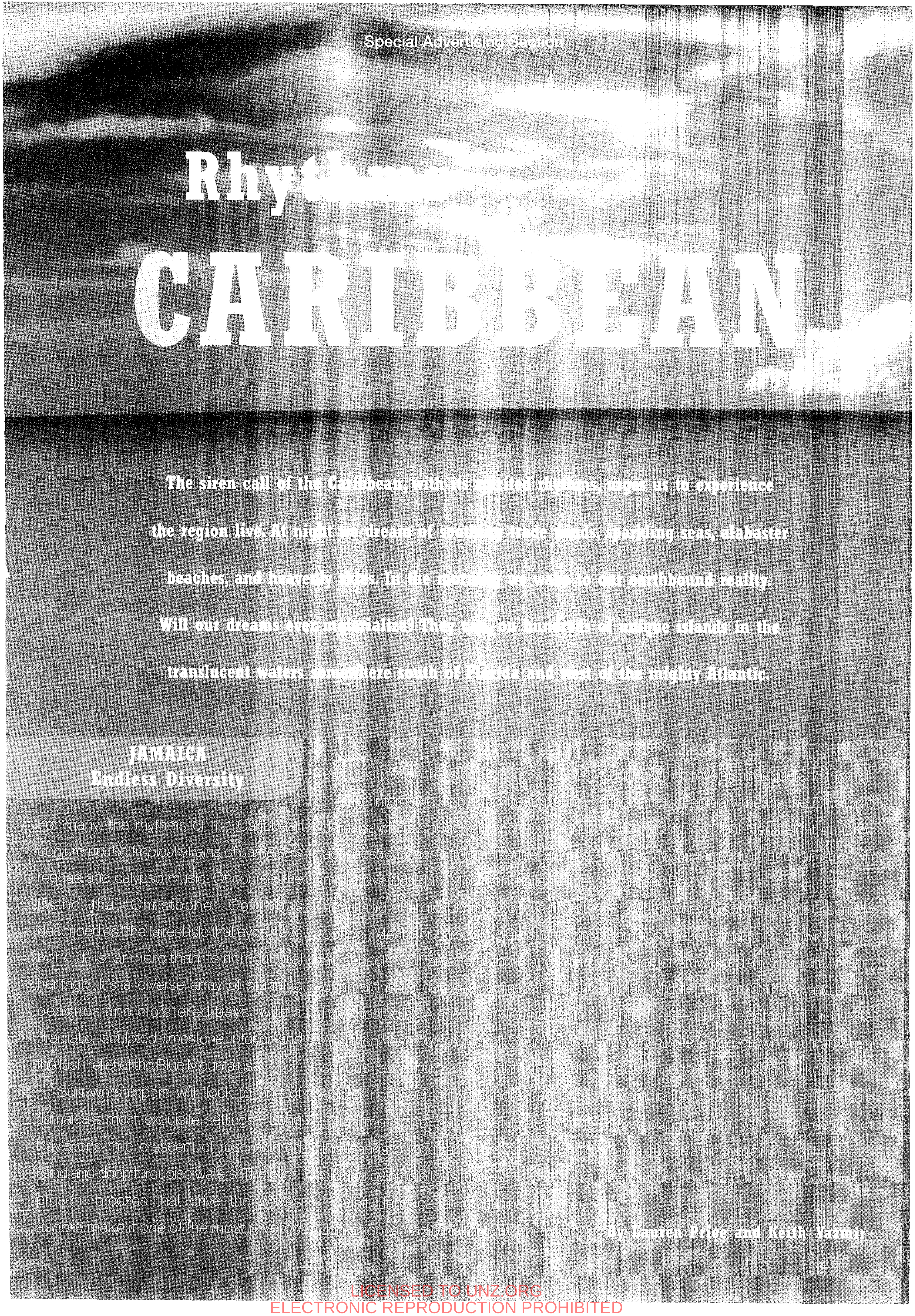
ment for Turner Broadcasting, which owns the Cartoon Network. ("Jonny Quest" did not become a hit, as it turned out.)

"We won't work for rivals," Wolf told me, "and that rule outlives specific engagements. We're conflicted out all the time." So how did he justify consulting for Nickelodeon after working for Turner? "That was later," he explained, and added that the two engagements dealt with "different issues." He also admitted that he has worked for "every trade-book publisher." Since all the big entertainment and media companies compete in multiple businesses—movies and cable channels and books and magazines—any company that brings Wolf in must have a tolerant attitude toward inherent conflicts of interest. But, as Wolf told me, the apparent "conflicts" often make him more attractive to his clients. David Stern, the N.B.A. commissioner, says one of the reasons he chose Booz, Allen was that Wolf had already worked for the N.F.L., and also for the TV networks that pay the N.B.A. for the rights to broadcast games. As one former client put it, "Michael's global perspective"—meaning his inside knowledge of competitors' businesses—"is worth any theoretical risk of one's own corporate secrets leaking out. He is like a bee buzzing among his clients' companies, flying from corporate flower to corporate flower, carrying bits of pollen from Time Warner down to Viacom, from Bertelsmann over to Hearst, and so on, round and round, cross-fertilizing the blooms in the infotainment ecology.

MICHAEL WOLF believes that his strongest suit is fearless, apolitical truth-telling. "A lot of the reason I've been able to work well with a lot of these people," he said, "is that I and our firm are very tough. I can go into a meeting room and shoot a missile in." Yet he seems very reluctant to alienate current or future clients.

One morning, Wolf was in a Booz, Allen conference room with two consultants who work under him, putting the final touches on an upcoming presentation to the executives of a magazine-publishing company.

Michele Anderson, the senior underling in the room, mentioned that one



Rhythms of the CARIBBEAN

The siren call of the Caribbean, with its spirited rhythms, urges us to experience the region live. At night we dream of soothing trade winds, sparkling seas, alabaster beaches, and heavenly skies. In the morning we wake to our earthbound reality. Will our dreams ever materialize? They can, on hundreds of unique islands in the translucent waters somewhere south of Florida and west of the mighty Atlantic.

JAMAICA
Endless Diversity

For many, the rhythms of the Caribbean conjure up the tropical strains of Jamaica's reggae and calypso music. Of course, the island that Christopher Columbus described as "the fairest isle that eyes have beheld" is far more than its rich cultural heritage. It's a diverse array of stunning beaches and cloistered bays, with a dramatic, sculpted limestone interior and the lush relief of the Blue Mountains.

Sun worshippers will flock to one of Jamaica's most exquisite settings—Long Bay's one-mile crescent of rose-colored sand and deep turquoise waters. The ever-present breezes that drive the waves ashore make it one of the most revered surfing spots on the island.

Not interested in playing beach bum? Jamaica offers a huge variety of sport and activities to choose from. Hike the [illegible] mist-covered Blue Mountain trails in the heartland of arguably the world's finest coffee. Meander through plantations on horseback. Golf on one of the island's [illegible] championship courses, some of which have hosted PGA and LPGA tournaments. And then head out to Cockpit Country for a serious adventure: a breathtaking helicopter ride over a five-hundred square-mile limestone plateau studded with thousands of conical hummocks that are divided by precipitous ravines.

Visit Jamaica at Christmas to see Junkanoo, a traditional holiday celebration during which revelers masquerade through the streets. February means the Pineapple Cup Yacht Race that starts eight hundred miles away in Miami and finishes in Montego Bay.

Whenever you go, make sure to sample Jamaica's fascinating homegrown cuisine, a fusion of Arawak Indian, Spanish, African, Indian, Middle Eastern, Chinese, and British influences—quite delectable. For breakfast, try ackee, a tree-grown fruit that, when cooked, bears an uncanny likeness to scrambled eggs. For lunch, it's Jamaica's most popular dish, *jerk*, a selection of tongue-searing marinated meats barbecued over a pimento wood fire.

By Lauren Price and Keith Yazmir

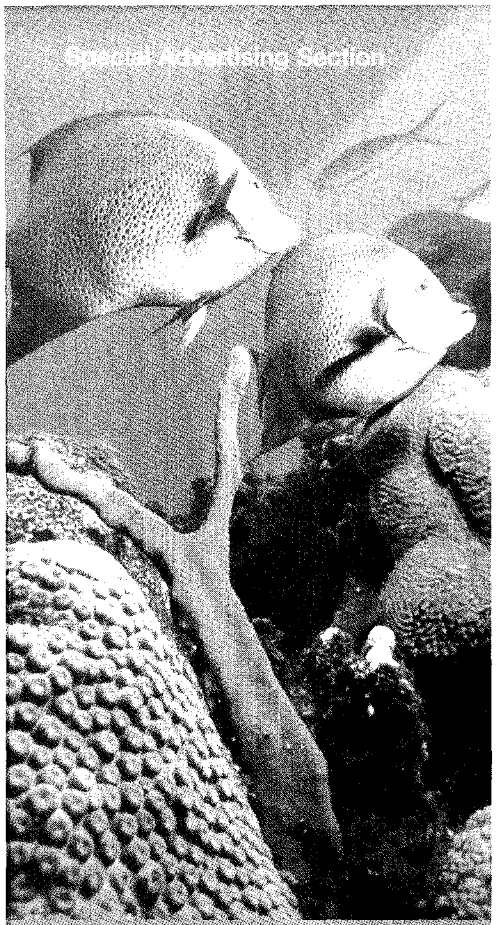


Photo op: The Cayman Islands offer some of the best snorkeling sites in the world.

THE CAYMAN ISLANDS
Kingdom of the Sea

Plunge beneath the waves into the nadir of snorkeling and diving and marvel at the coral-encrusted trench walls and refreshingly warm waters. If this sounds like a diving paradise, it is. But the Cayman Islands are much more than that.

Nature lovers will delight in the opportunity to commune with the world's largest breeding colony of red-footed boobies; they live side-by-side with West Indian whistling ducks and frigate birds at the Booby Pond Nature Reserve on Little Cayman.

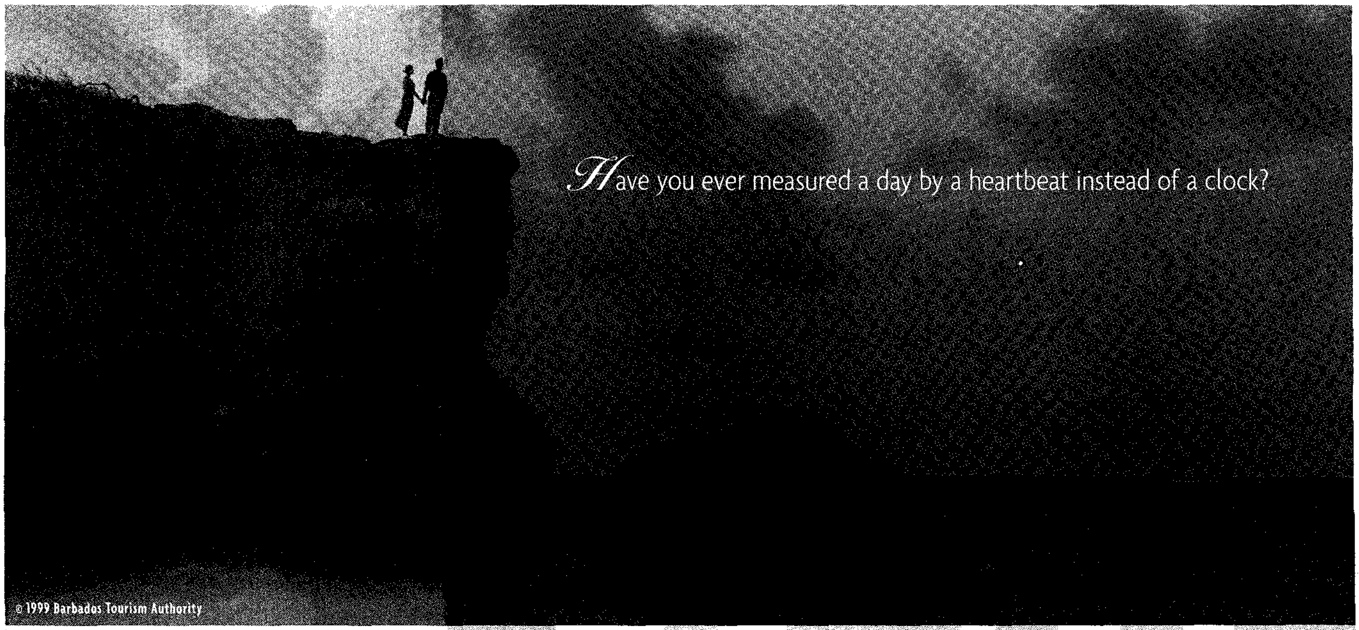
Feast on conch fritters, conch stew in coconut milk with onions and spices, conch chowder, and conch ceviche—served raw and thinly sliced in a lime and onion marinade. No matter the preparation, this shellfish is a native dish not to be missed.

Cover: ©Poul Hans Lange/nonstock

BARBADOS
A Bit of the Brit

Afternoon tea. Quaint Anglican churches. Spirited games of cricket. The Queen's serene portrait on the wall. One almost expects gray skies, stiff upper lips, and ubiquitous umbrellas. But don't be fooled. Despite its decidedly English bent, the endless pink- and white-sand beaches of Barbados and its year-round perfect weather provide constant reminders that you're definitely not in Britain.

Visit Barbados in February for the weeklong Holetown Festival celebration of the 1627 arrival of the first English settlers, complete with street fairs and a music festival. Or attend the Oistins Fish Festival over Easter for boat races and fish-boning competitions that pay tribute to the fisher folk of the village of Oistins. And for something a bit more intimate, what about a candlelit dinner at a two-hundred-year-old mahogany table in the three-hundred-year-old Sunbury Plantation House?


Have you ever measured a day by a heartbeat instead of a clock?

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BARBADOS

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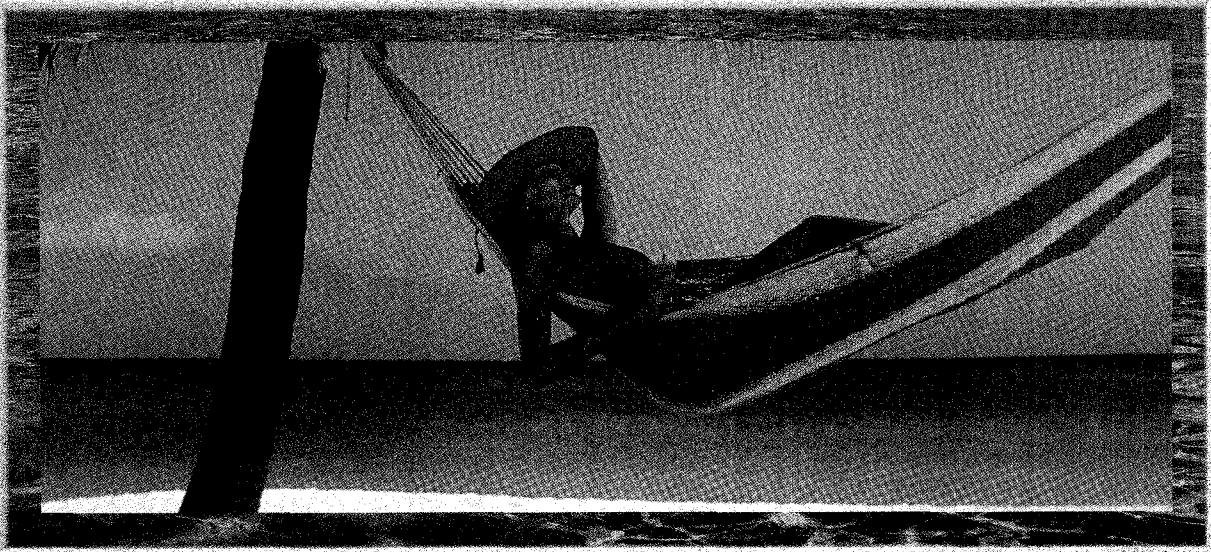
Find a vacant hammock
and remember how to dream.



The air is warm and filled with the scents of exotic flora. Here is the place to snorkel in waters the colour of turquoise or discover a home away from home in everything from grand luxury hotels to spacious villas and condos. So come, unwind and relax, Cayman Islands style. For more information call your travel agent or 1-800-346-3313 or visit our website at www.caymanislands.ky

CAYMAN ISLANDS

Relax Cayman Islands Style

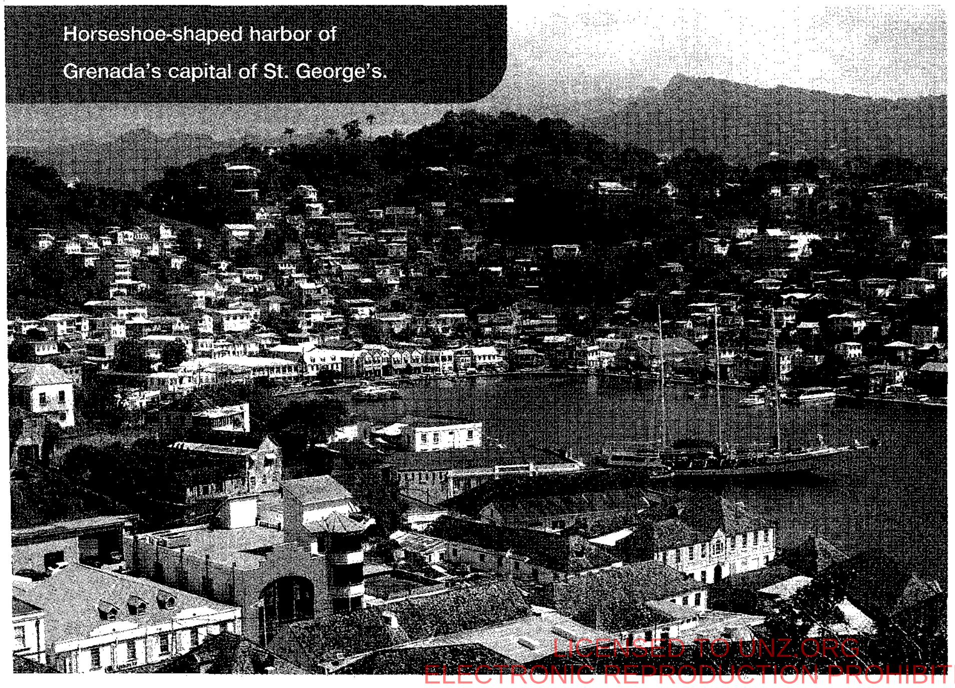
GRENADA
Isle of Spice

The zoning on Grenada is strict: no building can be taller than a coconut palm. Clearly, the three-island nation of Grenada has taken a cautious approach to tourism and its development, and the results are divine.

Grenada is known as the isle of spice. Thanks to ample supplies of nutmeg (one-third of the world's supply), cinnamon, mace, cocoa, and other aromatic flavorings, the country air is perfumed with a unique sweet fragrance.

Pristine beaches and secluded coves invite visitors to slow down. Relax. Enjoy. And for snorkelers and divers, the celebrated offshore wonders encompass more than two dozen major dive sites, including the largest shipwreck in the Caribbean—a six-hundred-foot Italian ocean liner, The Bianca C.

The panoply of tennis, golf, and water sports, and the delightful capital of St. George's with its picturesque horseshoe harbor, round out a piquant holiday.



Horseshoe-shaped harbor of Grenada's capital of St. George's.

TURKS & CAICOS
Beautiful by Nature

If you're not certain how to pronounce the second part of this British Crown colony's name, take heart. The relative obscurity of this spectacular island group (and for the record, it's KAY-kos) accrues from the attitude its inhabitants evince towards tourism. Quality, not quantity, has been their focus, and the net effect is a relaxed pace, low-key development, and a complete lack of any port for cruise ships.

Grand Turk claims the distinction of being the first place in the New World visited by Columbus. When he moved on, he left behind a paradise where lime, papaya, and sugar-apple trees flourish; great blue herons and woodstar

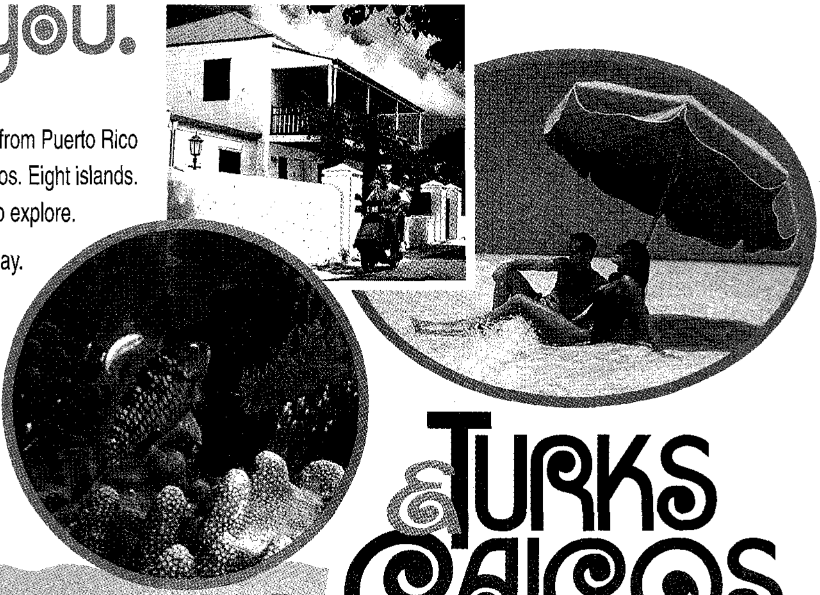
The colorful Jaco Parrot can be found along Dominica's protected nature trails.

hummingbirds fill the air, and an underwater pageant of turtles, parrot fish, and dolphins abounds.

The intrigue of one of the world's largest coral reefs also beckons snorkelers and scuba divers just offshore. And between January and March, the inviting waters are host to one of nature's most awe-inspiring shows, as 2,500 eastern Atlantic humpback whales swim by en route to their winter breeding grounds.

DOMINICA
Unspoiled Isle

It is said that if Columbus were to return to the Caribbean today, Dominica would be the only island he would recognize. Since agriculture remains its primary economic base, the effects of modernism on this land of soaring mountains, roaring waterfalls, and black sand beaches have been minimal. Much of the interior remains covered by luxuriant virgin rain forests not easily accessible by road. If this isn't enough, abundant rainbows caused by sun reflecting through fleeting rain clouds herald that this is no ordinary place.



Between Florida and Puerto Rico is a place that will amaze you.

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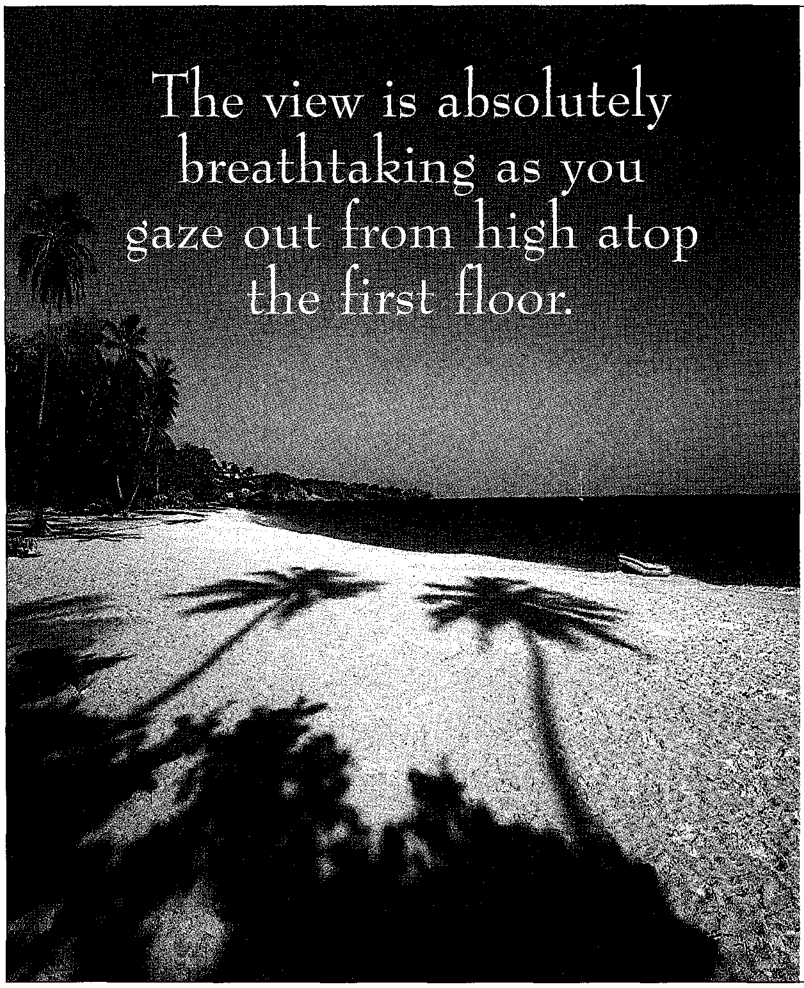
You can scuba dive, bird watch, beachcomb or relax with a book on any of our breathtaking beaches. Stay at hotels, villas or guest cottages. A vacation to Turks and Caicos is just that: a vacation.

Turks & Caicos Islands
Beautiful by Nature.

For more information, call the Turks and Caicos Islands Tourist Board.
Tel: 800-241-0824 or 305-891-4117, fax: 305-891-7096. Or visit us at www.turksandcaicostourism.com, e-mail: tci.tourism@tciway.tc



The view is absolutely breathtaking as you gaze out from high atop the first floor.

There's a funny law in Grenada. It says that no hotel can be taller than a coconut palm. See, we think our island is about the prettiest place on earth and we don't want a lot of big buildings getting in the way of tropical rain forests and green mountains and fragrant spice fields and white beaches.

So, if you're looking for an unspoiled place to vacation we say welcome. But if you're looking to stay in a highrise, well, that would be breaking the law.

For more information, call your travel professional or 800-927-9554.

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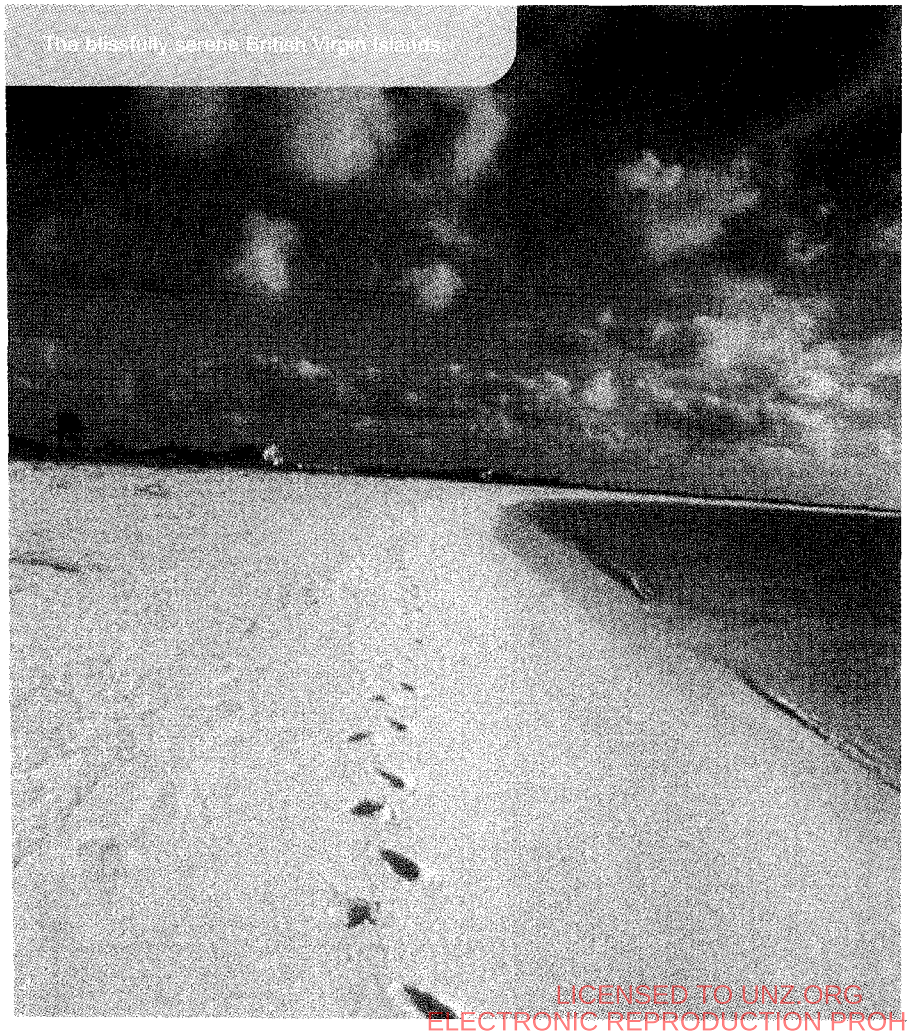
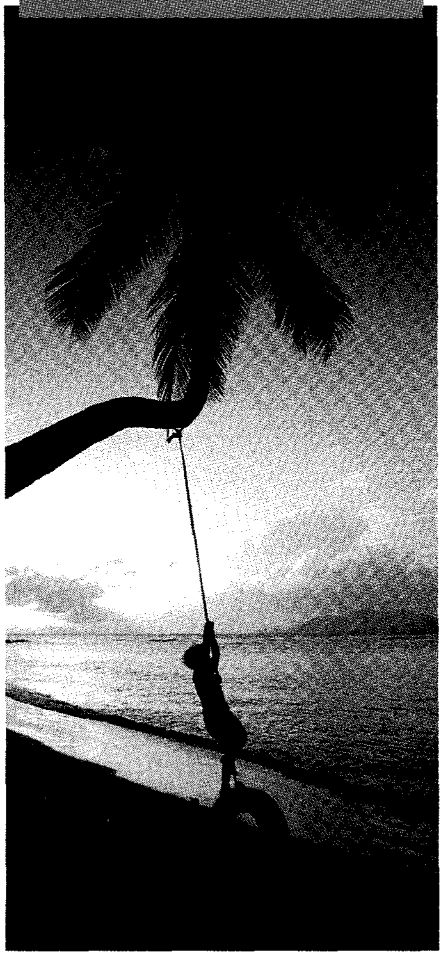


The blissfully serene British Virgin Islands.

This winter, the island nation's twenty-first anniversary of independence coincides with the arrival of the twenty-first century, and festivities include the Christmas Festival on December 19th followed by *Mas Domnik*, Dominica's carnival in February and March.

BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS
Islands of Leisure

Palm and mango trees grow in profusion on a stretch of most of the more than sixty islands, where the hybrid culture is evident in the food, music, sports, and homemade sloops that locals use for fishing. Your most demanding tasks in the BVI will be deciding where to stay, what to eat, and how to amuse yourself next. Bed down in a chartered yacht and cruise from island to island? Retreat to an all-inclusive resort where sunbathing between ocean dips is the chosen form of worship? Wander through Sage Mountain's rain forest-like terrain? Snack on conch fritters washed down with a pint of ale? You can also watch a feisty game of cricket or listen to *fungi* bands play gourd- and washboard-laced rhythms.



NO INN CROWDS.

In the little bit of Paradise that is the British Virgin Islands, the most captivating little hotels, inns, villas and cottages abound. Usually within a sand pebble's throw of the most beckoning blue you've ever seen. From the modestly priced to the self-indulgent, you'll find sheer perfection. Call 1-800-888-5563, ext.629 for our Intimate Inns and Villas guide.

THE BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS
NATURE'S LITTLE SECRETS

ST. VINCENT & THE GRENADINES Splendor on the Run

Many visitors don't linger on the island of St. Vincent for long, eager as they are to head to the Grenadines, a string of thirty-two islands and cays whose powdery-white beaches gleam like oases from across the waters. But with its lush mountains, fertile valleys, quiet villages, and vast stretches of sand, St. Vincent is well worth dallying in.

CARIBBEAN DIRECTORY

The Annemarie Victory Organization
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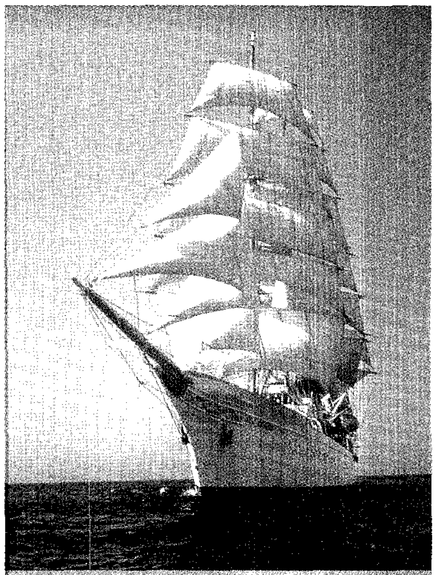
Sail among the Windward Islands on board the spectacular Sea Cloud for a pleasure cruise focusing on the history and legends of naval warfare in the Caribbean. The voyage (February 12–19) is a follow-up to last year's extraordinarily popular Patrick O'Brian cruise, and is set to provide a wonderful mix of sightseeing, fine dining, dancing, and just plain relaxing—all in some of the most spectacular settings on earth, including Antigua, Iles des Saintes, Martinique, Dominica, and Nevis.

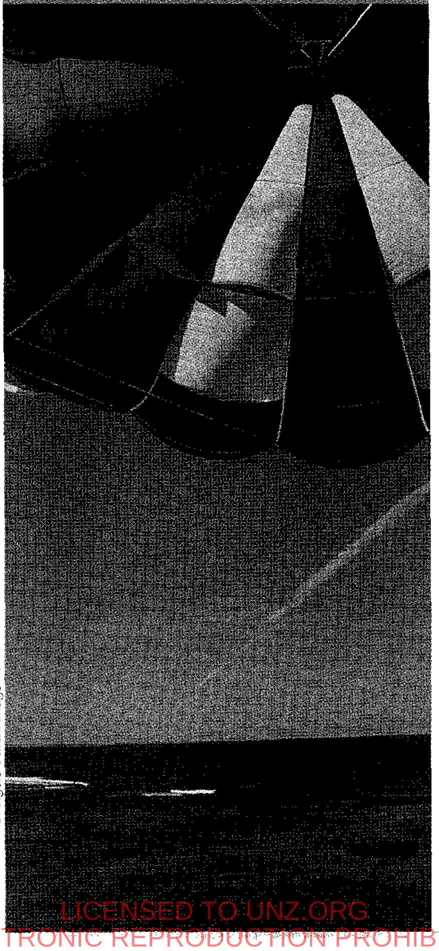


Bygone elegance [illegible] Sea Cloud.

Anse Chastanet Hotel
Soufrière, St. Lucia
800-223-1108

One of St. Lucia's premier dive resorts, Anse

Parasailing is among the many adventures visitors can choose from when visiting the Turks & Caicos islands.



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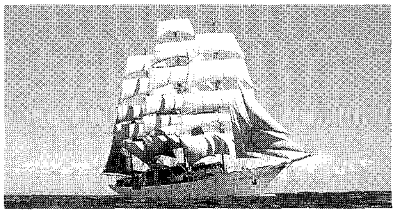

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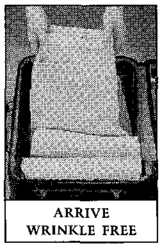

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St. Thomas, U.S.V.I.
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The Buccaneer
St. Croix, U.S.V.I.
800-255-3881

Pink and patrician, this former cattle ranch and sugar plantation offers prime St. Croix beaches and some of the best golf and tennis programs on the island.

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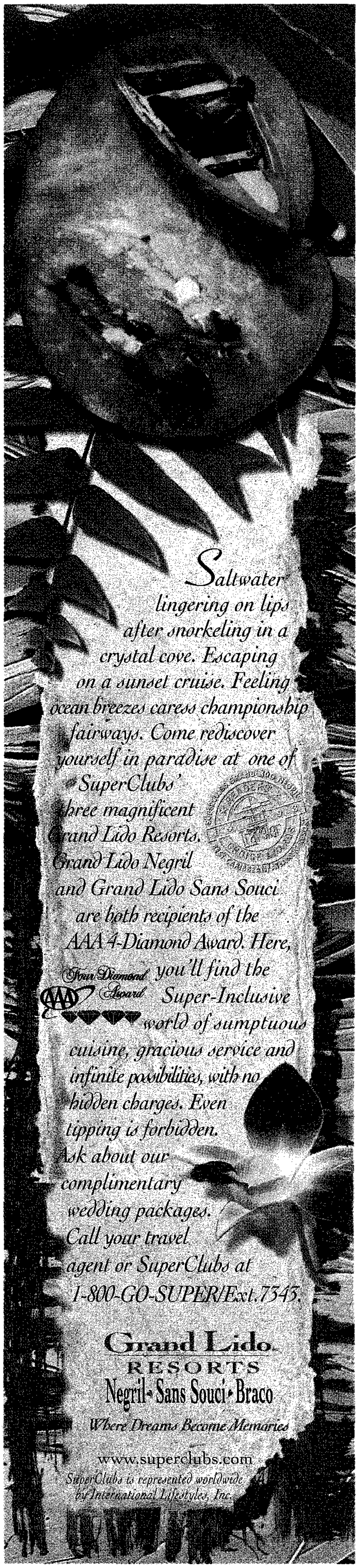
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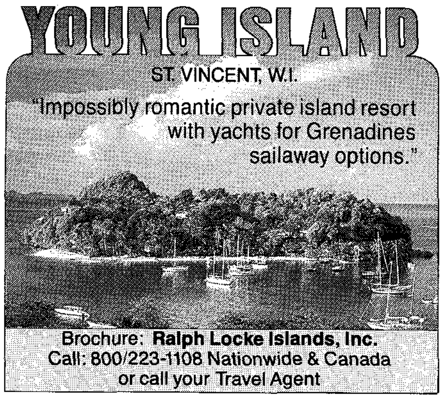

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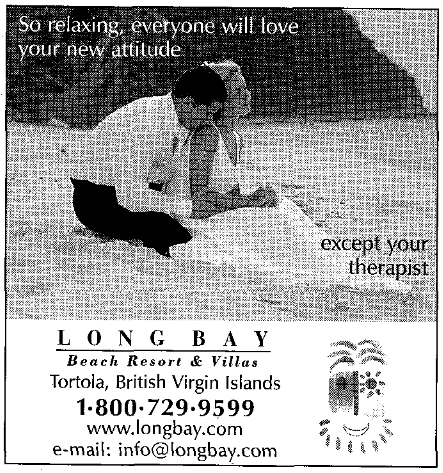

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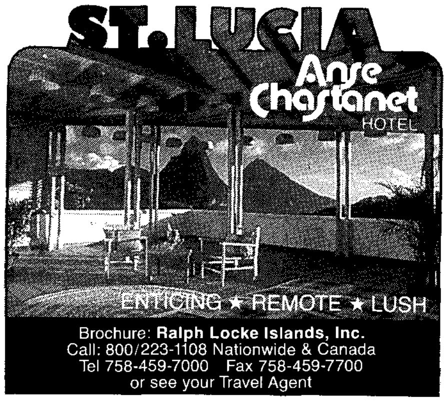

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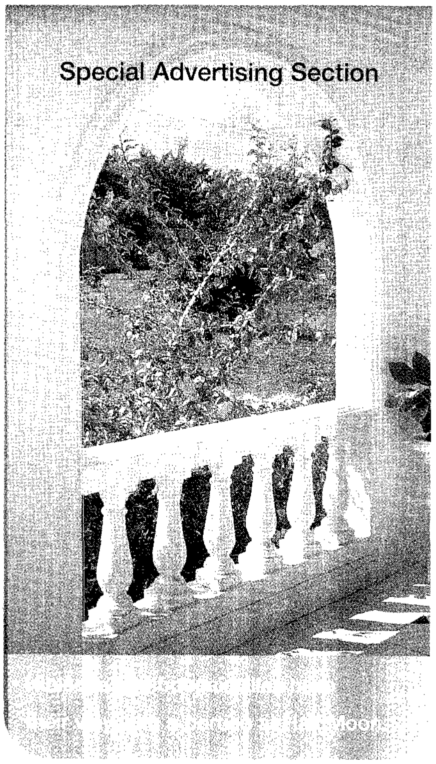

inclusive resort. Guests are revitalized with activities like stress management, tai chi, and yoga. A stay at LeSport is the definition of a healthy holiday, with options ranging from night tennis to fencing, waterskiing to Sunfish sailing, bike touring to golf. At the end of an exhilarating workout, take advantage of a soothing body wrap and a salt loofah buff. But don't forget to catch the spectacular sunset!

Long Bay Beach Resort & Villas
Tortola, BVI
800-729-9599

Home to the largest swimming pool in the British Virgin Islands, this fifty-two-acre resort lures guests with a mile-long stretch of pristine beach. Take advantage of the recently opened spa and gymnasium with a full array of exercise equipment.

Pavilions & Pools
St. Thomas, U.S.V.I.
800-524-2001

Twenty-five one-bedroom villas, each with its own private swimming pool. All the seclusion you could possibly wish for with the high service standards of a luxury resort.

Port Yacht Charters
800-213-0465

Ken Hecht, president of Port Yacht Charters, is a weaver of dreams. He matches Caribbean-bound clients with unique yachting vacations perfectly suited to their needs—from large groups to intimate couples. All-inclusive voyages include a skilled captain, an unobtrusive crew, gourmet meals, and completely flexible itineraries generally priced at less than two-hundred dollars per person per day, making the yachting experience accessible.

Settlers' Beach Villa Hotel
Holetown, St. James, Barbados
246-432-0840

This serene collection of two-bedroom villas, perched on a sparkling beach, features four acres of lush tropical gardens and the excellent Ile de France restaurant.

Sonesta Beach Resort & Villas
Anguilla
800-SONESTA

This romantic and tranquil resort is set dramatically on a three-mile stretch of pristine beach. A hundred luxury guestrooms, suites, and villas all with marble bathrooms, balconies, or terraces provide guests with a feeling of privacy. Handcrafted Mediterranean mosaic arches and fountains along with lush tropical landscaping makes the Anguilla resort a destination of distinction.

Spring on Bequia
Bequia, St. Vincent & the Grenadines
612-823-1202

Ten spacious guest rooms grace this two-hundred-year-old working plantation (bananas, citrus fruit, coconuts, grapes, and vegetables) offering the ultimate in utter relaxation on an island that practically defines the term.

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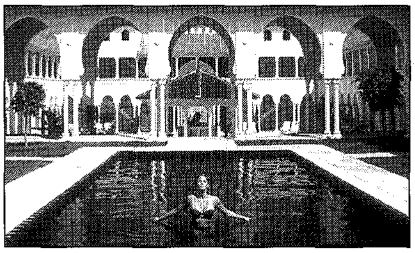

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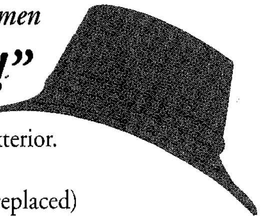

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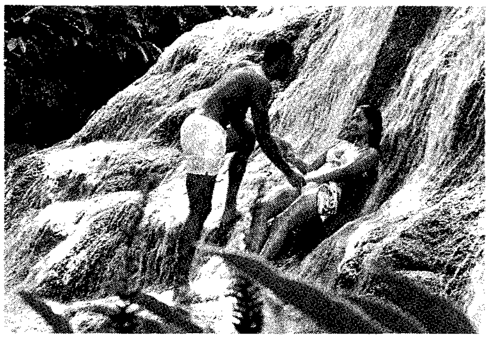

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of the company's biggest magazines "had a tremendous falloff of readers per copy year to year."

"They're all saying, 'Circ is down, circ is down,' " Wolf said. "But no one is looking at the root causes. We can't take an incremental approach."

A little later, Anderson said that executives at the company wanted to change the way they think about building circulation.

"But they haven't *done* anything," Wolf said. "It really comes down to the ability to execute."

Anderson suggested they create a slide for the presentation that would depict the long-term circulation declines of all the company's magazines.

No. "That may be rubbing salt in the wound," he told her. "I don't want this to be a lot of doom and gloom."

ANOTHER time, Wolf and his partner Geoff Sands were meeting with two younger consultants, both women, to plan the presentation of their report to the executives of a cable-TV channel.

"We looked at a lot of out-of-the-box options," one of the consultants explained.

Before she could list those options, Wolf said, "But they're not going to work."

The young woman smiled.

"I'm still intrigued by the idea of using the channel as a testing ground for new network shows," Sands said. "But the people at the channel really pushed back on that."

"They didn't have a very good development slate in the past," the other woman said.

"Is there enough money for them to be doing their own shows?" Wolf asked.

Heads were tilted tentatively, dubiously, then shaken.

"We got a lot of resistance on anything to do with scheduling," Sands said.

The senior of the two consultants said, "One big pitch we make is for new investment. We need to say, 'You should *build* this asset as opposed to' . . . " She smiled. "We didn't say 'milking.' "

"They need a bold stroke," Wolf said.

Someone mentioned the boldest, most obvious stroke of all—persuading the channel's various co-owners to sell their partial interests to just one among them so that the channel would have a single corporate parent with a consistent agenda.

Wolf shook his head. "Don't turn their world upside down. I don't think it's realistic. They'll just find it irritating."

IN "The Entertainment Economy," Wolf describes just about every entertainment C.E.O. in America as a genius. ("That's way cranked back," his collaborator, Peter Kaminsky, said. "He was more effusive about all of them" in the original version.) And in the internal Booz, Allen meetings I attended, after the candid roundtable critiques of the various companies' shortsightedness and disarray, Wolf invariably reined in his staff, cautioning them not to upset the clients by being too blunt.

He seemed taken aback when I mentioned this. "I think there's a difference between annoying somebody and picking your battles," he explained. "This is not about pulling punches. What I don't want to do is just put up a bunch of stuff that annoys people. A lot of this comes down to how you present the answer. See, when you deal with entertainment companies, they're used to stories and narratives, so they have to be able to walk through the logic and get to the answer themselves."

Wolf repeatedly uses therapeutic tropes to explain his work. "If you ask my six-year-old what does his dad do, he says, 'He's a doctor for companies.' " Describing the difficulties he's had convincing client companies to deal with their dysfunctions, Wolf said, "People won't take their medicine unless they believe their tummy aches." Often, his doctor-patient metaphors are specifically psychiatric. More than once, he spoke of companies "being in denial" when he tells them they have problems. The Booz, Allen team's principal task for the N.B.A., according to David Stern, has been helping him to transform the league from a mom-and-pop outfit into a much bigger, bureaucratically managed multimedia entertainment corporation—introducing tighter budgetary and business planning, cost-benefit analysis, strategic-planning processes. But in addition, Stern said, "Michael has a calming influence on me." When I asked Wolf how he bills clients, he said, "It's based on hours, but usually we agree on a fee up front. We don't want clients to feel we have any interest" in running up bill-

"I'm pretty sure it's a jaybird."

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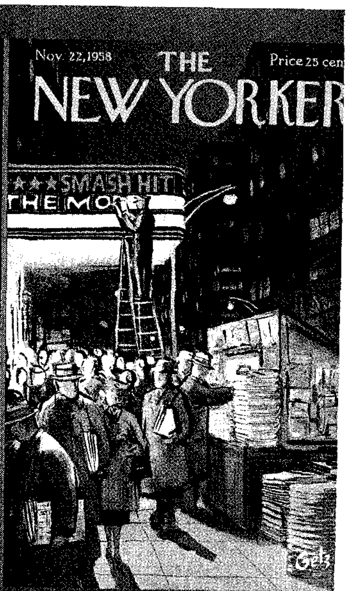

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Interestingly, that is precisely Anthea Disney's complaint about her Booz, Allen experience. "Part of their thing is to draw a bleaker picture of your business, so you keep coming back," she told me. "They're not going to tell you you're well and you don't need the treatment. They don't want you to get off the couch."

Several months after we met, Wolf assured me that all of the engagements I had observed earlier had been successful. The patients were on the road to recovery. At the cable channel, he said, "I showed what they were doing wasn't going to work. The programming person didn't want to change, but my job is to be an agent of change." His record-company client had announced its new CD-pricing scheme, and had got favorable press coverage. The magazine company, he said, is persuading clothing stores to carry one of its women's magazines, "because it makes the retail offering cooler."

"ULTIMATELY, you have to make judgments about the intrinsic qualities of the products," Wolf said of his work as a consultant. His clients' products include Comedy Central's "South Park" and its new, bouncing-bosom program, "The Man Show"; the "Jerry Springer Show" (Studios USA); "Rivera Live" (CNBC); and "World Championship Wrestling" (Time Warner). More than one of his clients distribute rap CDs that glorify misogyny and guns. "Yes," he acknowledged, "but I think some of my clients, like MTV—MTV has very smartly sponsored antiviolence campaigns. . . . I have yet to find a case where there's a client I won't work for. But I wouldn't be surprised if that day came. . . . So far, I haven't."

I asked Wolf if he ever had any qualms about his work, whether, for instance, he's disturbed by the replacement of homespun civic culture with synthetic, mass-marketed fun. "I'm not disturbed by it," he said. "I really believe that entertainment in a lot of ways has become a way for people to come together. . . . It has, in fact, become—I'm convinced of this—it's become a replacement for religion. And I think that in the same way people used to quote Scripture they're now quoting 'Seinfeld.'"

Despite his surface nerdiness, Wolf needs to be fluent, as he says often, with "what's cool and what's not cool." I heard him tell someone that "the Taco Bell Chihuahua is about being cool." He recently started wearing jeans to work on some days, and told me he wants Booz, Allen's next offices to be more open and loftlike—"cool." During a meeting, when Wolf mentioned the difficulty of breaking new recording artists, one of the younger consultants brought up two recent breakthrough successes, Fatboy Slim and Big Bad Voodoo Daddy. Wolf and the other two suit-and-tie white guys all nodded knowingly: Hmm, right, Big Bad Voodoo Daddy. When another junior consultant touted the prospects of Les Nubians, a duo of Spice Girls manqué from France, Wolf shook his head.

"Americans aren't going to buy a *French* group," he said.

Wolf's partner John Frelinghuysen then suggested that he listen to the techno-pop band Enigma.

"I've heard Enigma," he replied quickly, "and it's not gonna happen. It's an L.A. and New York thing."

At the meeting about one of their cable-channel clients, Geoff Sands said the firm's essential recommendation would be that the executives "focus on edgy."

Wolf agreed. "It's about what your parents don't want you to watch. Like MTV."

"I think you're right," Sands said. "Racy, edgy, irreverent—"

"Racy, no," Wolf amended. "Edgy, yes. Irreverent, yes." A little later, discussing how to present the recommendations to that client, Wolf said, "We have to revisit this issue about 'edgy.'"

"We've tried to push this," one of his lieutenants said, but the channel's head of programming "gets very, very touchy."

Wolf said that instead of critiquing specific programs on the channel they should push the executives to make changes in scheduling that would merely give the channel's edgier programs a higher profile. "It reminds me of the time with Lew Wasserman," he said, referring to his work for the chairman of M.C.A./Universal in 1995. "Someone

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—Kay Ryan

said, 'I don't like that show,' and I kicked him under the table. Nobody cares what the consultant likes."

WHAT *does* the consultant like? Wolf's job is to advise the distributors and marketers of every form of popular culture. "I'll bet you he really watches nothing," one of his clients in the TV business—a satisfied client—had said to me. And one of his colleagues said, more or less approvingly, "He experiences media and entertainment as executive summaries. He sees if it works or not." But I was curious about Wolf's own tastes, about which kinds of entertainment and media engage or amuse him most.

"I watch a lot of TV shows," he said. "I spend an enormous amount of time in music stores, in bookstores."

But he didn't mention any specific programs, bands, or books. Does he watch MTV?

"Most of the time—I turned it off just now," he said, sounding a little anxious, nodding toward the television set in a corner of his office. "What I try to do is to know what's going on, what's being listened to, what kind of movies are out there. I can read a women's magazine, because I work for a lot of women's magazines, and there are parts I'll laugh at. I have a great time at this."

But presumably, I suggested, he prefers to work for clients whose products genuinely interest him.

"Of course not," he said. "Because what's exciting about this is getting a view of what's appealing to every type of group. One of our clients is one of the big TV networks in Brazil. They produce these *telenovelas*, the soap operas. I can have a good time watching it. That doesn't mean that's something I'm going to turn on every day."

When I pressed Wolf for an example of something he personally enjoys—an author or a composer or pop act or director—he finally remembered one thing. "This is going to sound corny," he said, "but one of the only times that I was dying to see a movie was one of the 'Star Trek' movies—'First Contact.' I called over to Viacom and said, 'Please, can I come?' " He giggled. "But otherwise . . . "

Michael Wolf may be the ultimate undiscriminating postmodern cultural consumer, crazy about nothing, happy to glancingly experience everything. "At this point, it's really not about my tastes," he told me. "I enjoy a lot of things—my tastes are also sort of very with the masses. . . . I like comedies. . . . I'm just trying to think, *Is* there something?" He thought for another moment. "The tough question is, Is there something I don't like?" ♦

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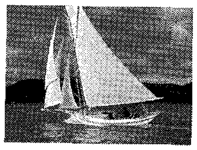

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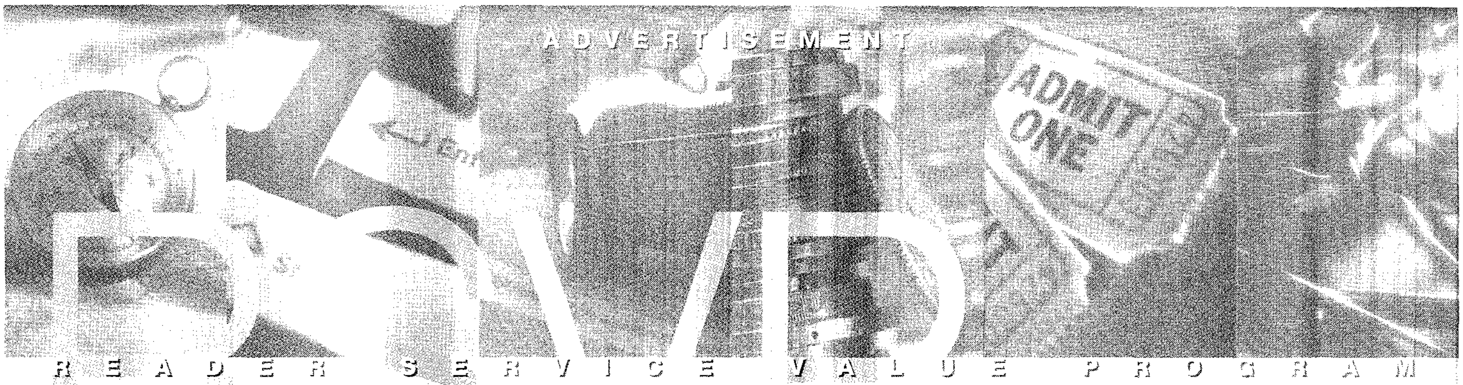

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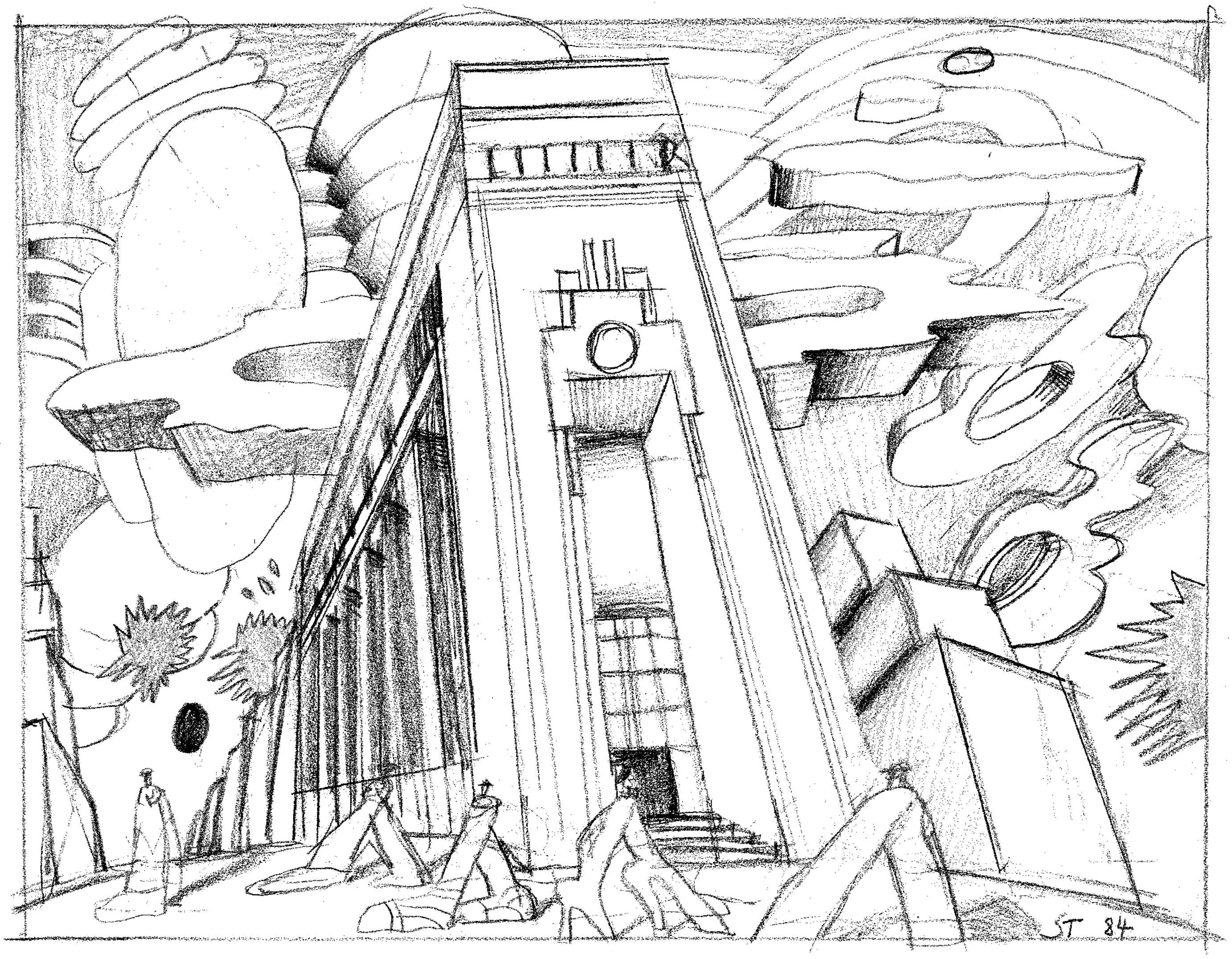

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REFLECTIONS

THE FUTURE OF FAITH

Confessions of a churchgoer.

BY JOHN UPDIKE

As the ungodly-sounding year 2000 draws perilously close, faith in America hangs on. The Christian right, with abortion and school prayer as its flagship issues, remains a vocal and intimidating political force, capable of getting evolution labelled a mere theory in Kansas, though not yet of legislating all the morality it thinks the nation needs. Our President, a proclaimed sorry sinner, speaks the language of the Bible Belt with a native accent. God and the afterlife still do well in polls, clocking affirmative ratings of around ninety per cent for belief in God and eighty per cent for the afterlife. In fact, according to a 1999 study by Mark Chaves, a sociologist at the University of Arizona, belief in the afterlife is going up, even as church attendance drops. Attendance and membership have been drifting lower ever since the baby boomers, joining churches as they began to generate families, started to wander away again. Though for decades polls have pegged the number of regular churchgoing Americans at around forty per cent, Chaves claims that only twenty-eight per cent of Roman Catholics attend Mass on a given weekend and fewer than one in five Protestants are in church on Sunday morning. Home study and the Sunday-morning religious shows on television are cutting into church attendance. As part of the do-it-yourself trend, the sales of religious books have risen spectacularly, by fifty per cent in the last ten years.

Yet those few who make it to worship service can testify that there is some liveliness within the churches. Ever younger, frequently female clergypersons have succeeded to the pulpits, and their tone, as they openly cope with such long-unspeakable issues as sexual prophylaxis and homosexual marriage rites, is, all in all, laid-back. A certain pleasantly faded flower-child, hug-your-neighbor sweetness has replaced the sterner old dispensations. Except for the Southern civil-rights movement led by the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., the widespread religious impulses of the sixties in America occurred mainly outside the churches, and, indeed, outside Christianity altogether; but the social gospel of love, with its outreach to the losers of the world, including endangered species, has come inside. Where else, in these "me" decades, can one hear it? The younger clergy strike me as resolutely liberal, cheerful, and fearless. Worldliness has no horrors to dismay them. They are bathed in the same blithe outpouring of televised mayhem and prurience as the unchurched. Collectively they have, from St. Paul on, seen it all. If a four-year-old child, welcomed now to the Episcopal altar rail to partake of the Host, makes a face and spits it out, no scandal attends; the sacrament, once attained to through the scholarly coming-of-age process of confirmation, is taken to be profanation-proof. And there is much of the New Testament Jesus in this; the Gospels unite in describing Him as no prig.

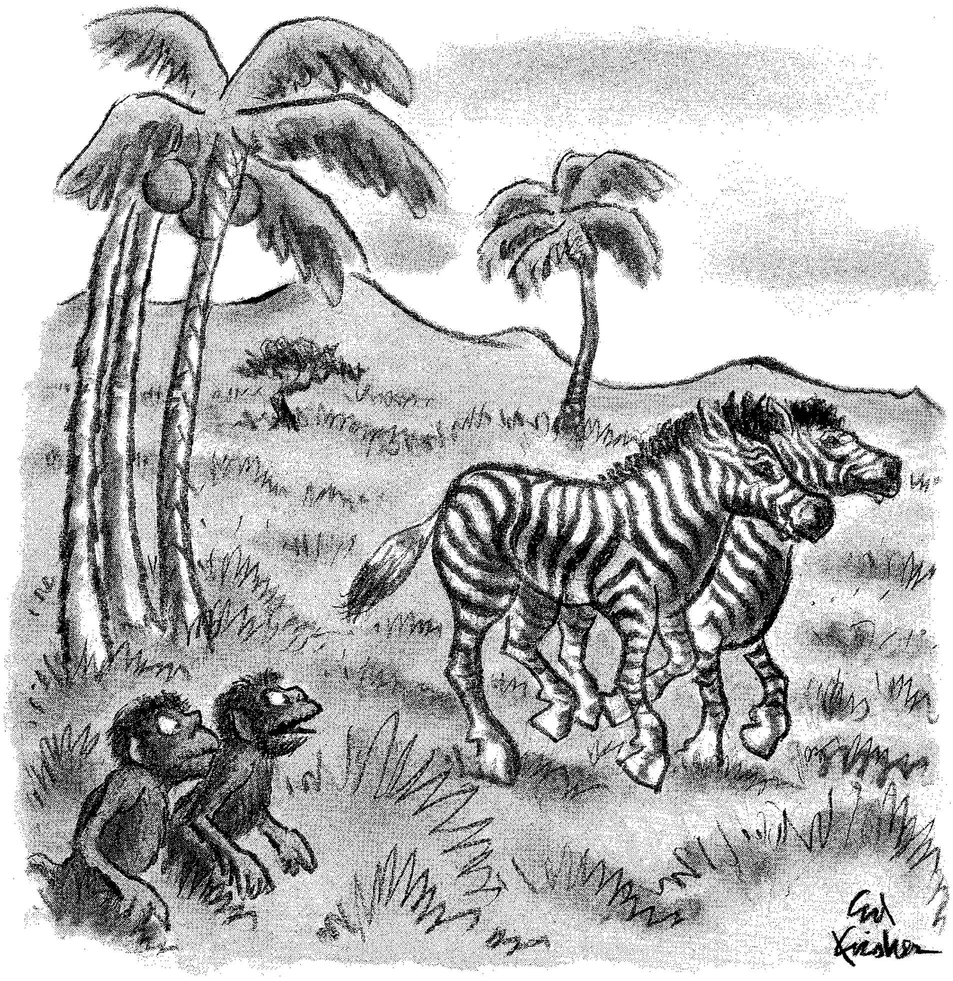
Beyond the Christian precincts, all sorts of New Age mysticisms, from feng-shui and crystal-gazing to angelolatry and posthumous celebrity-spotting, thrive in spurts of publicity-driven fad. As William James demonstrated at the other end of the century, in his classic "The Varieties of Religious Experience," the human creature's religious instinct is as obdurate and resourceful as its sexual instinct, and as impervious to reason. Globally, Islamic fundamentalism demonstrates a creed's power to induce censorship and repression and to inspire solidarity and martyrdom; there is even, in India, a counterdefensive Hindu fundamentalism—the oldest living religion seeking in its plethora of deities the root revelation, the basic allegiance. Much of religious loyalty is, after all, a mode of defiance, insisting, *This is what I am.* One thinks of the Irish and the Polish rallying around their Roman Catholicism to spite their larger, colonizing neighbors. Now that the smothering mantle of Communism has been lifted from Eastern Europe, the churches are free to serve as more than foci of contrariety, and, after an immediate surge in attendance and attention, are facing indifference, in its way more deadly than hostility. "We are now past the era of euphoria," a Russian Orthodox Church spokesman has said. In the Czech Republic, four decades of official atheism successfully broke down the religious fabric over whose composition the seventeenth-century Czechs had spilled so much blood. The great Prague churches stand as gorgeous but empty monuments to the Counter-Reformation, used mostly to hold concerts for Western tourists. An acquaintance of mine taking a Czech bride found his hopes of a church wedding in her village met with uncomprehending stares, as if some groom from New Guinea, with elaborate facial paint and a bone through his septum, were asking that the volcano god be propitiated with a blood sacrifice.

The welter of religious phenomena is not necessarily comforting to the professor of a specific faith; the very multiplicity and variety suggest that none of it is true, other than manifesting an undoubted human tendency. A Protestant Christian on the eve of the third millennium must struggle with the sensation that his sect is, like the universe itself in the latest cosmological news, winding down, growing thinner and thinner. As I travelled recently in Italy, trudging in a trance of jet lag from the Uffizi to the churchly sites of various delicately deteriorating and ingeniously restored frescoes, and then on from Florence to Venice, the checkpoints of the Christian story as phrased by the Renaissance artists—Adam and Eve and the serpent, and then, in divine reversal of this Fall, the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Virgin's Adoration of the (usually oversized, rather superior and stern) God-Baby, the Adoration of the Wise Men, on up to the dénouement of Crucifixion, Deposition from the Cross, Pietà, and (most thrillingly by Piero della Francesca on a wall in Sansepolcro) the Resurrection—began to seem opaque, inconsequent, a repetition like that of certain maddening television commercials, this ancient Christian story, this cosmic anthropocentricity, that had provoked oceans of words and served a hundred generations as a paradigm to live and die by, and whose details in hasty summary I professed assent to every time I attended church. How much more mileage could be squeezed from these darkened, crumbling images?

My wife at my side, I should say, never wearied. Each new Annunciation enchanted her with its difference from all the others: in some, Gabriel holds a lily, and in others a palm; the book Mary is traditionally reading can be in her hand, in her lap, or on a lectern; the mood of this moment (imagine being a young Jewish girl informed that she is pregnant by and with God; imagine, for that matter, being a handsome heavenly messenger boy, youthful and androgynous and winged in rainbow colors, dispatched to deliver this astonishing news) ranges with a wonderful freedom from mystical acceptance to gesturing consternation. Mary is variously alarmed, humble, demurely puzzled, regally pleased, and Gabriel gracefully kneeling, woodenly standing, or arriving in a breathless gust with both bare feet off the floor. In one cinquecento example, at the Palazzo Grassi, in an exhibition devoted to the interaction between Venetian painting and Northern realism, a cat between Mary and Gabriel leaps and bristles at the announcement. My wife laughed in delight. And when we pressed our faces against the grille that rudely interferes with viewing the famous Deposition by Pontormo, in the Capponi Chapel in Florence's Santa Felicità, and, on the adjacent wall, an Annunciation that consists of two frescoed figures separated by a window and an ornate altarpiece, even I felt buoyed by the luminous floatingness Pontormo conveys in his electric, fruity colors—by the annulment of universal gravity proposed by the Christian comedy.

An Italian guide who took us, once, to see the Pontormo Visitation that hangs in lonely grandeur in the parish church of San Michele, in Carmignano, seemed gratified by the idea, put forward by scholars of Renaissance art, that the apparent hollowness of the artist's figures, the doll-like blankness of their faces and the refusal of their billowing robes to suggest bulk, in fact confesses an otherwise inexpressible emptying out of belief: the Mannerism of Pontormo—a man of considerable personal strangeness—anticipates the religious mockeries of modernism.

At the end of two weeks of inspecting church walls and holy images, I thought to cleanse my palate, as it were, by visiting the Venice Biennale. My wife declined to waste her precious time on modern trash. Alone, a dazed and footsore pilgrim, I made my way from one pavilion to another, exposing myself to artificial fog and upside-down dandelions in the Belgian pavilion, unintelligible whispers and showers of magenta dust in the American, a room of electronic numbers in the Japanese, and in the Russian pavilion photographs taken by a chimpanzee and abstract paintings brushed by trained elephants. Everywhere, abrasive irony and nihilism. The Germans mounted huge videos of nothing much happening, and the Slovaks hundreds of tattoos, with an apparently sincere offer to needle any of the designs into a visitor's skin at appointed hours. A deafening, enraged roar of racing automobiles and stacks of painted tires filled the Danish pavilion; the French had actually dismantled the floor of their exhibit hall, a solid old structure dating back to 1912, and showed its fragments under a grate, ten feet down. The French also incorporated several utterly white rooms, along whose surfaces of blazing vacuity floated the specks of my aging vitreous humors. It was an innocent little nation—Uruguay, South Korea—that exhibited something, in used woods or nacreous sequins, that reminded one of art in the old sense, even in the older modern sense, of a physical object amenable to being contemplated and housed. The desire to shock the hardened art connoisseur into some kind of response had become veritably frantic; there was hardly an inch of void, of disgust, of scorn left to expose, in this age of post-faith. Only the vegetation and the other spectators at the Biennale—generally young, drifting hand in hand from one calculated, not infrequently obscene affront to another—belonged to a world I wanted to be in.



"Why is it that they always go around talking about how they earned their stripes?"

Faith is not so much a binary pole as a quantum state, which tends to indeterminacy when closely examined. In the several New England suburbs where I have lived my adult life, there was no easy telling, from other signs, who was and who was not a churchgoer. Models of rectitude and conventionality turned out to scorn religious observance, to the point that even their funerals were held in the wild, a scattering of ashes leaving no trace. Other citizens of the suburbs, cheerfully dissolute and giddy on weekdays, appeared compulsively at early Sunday service, under their weight of hangover and carnal knowledge. We all know of the women who come to pray while their husbands lounge in front of "Face the Nation" or sit in the car reading the newspaper; but I have been struck by the number of unaccompanied men who show up in church, sitting, standing, and kneeling their way through this errand of habit or ancestral homage. A differentiating factor of intelligence is not conspicuous. At the end of the millennium, and of a century that has the Holocaust at its center, the reasons for doubt in God's existence are so easily come by—His invisibility, His apparent indifference to the torrents of pain and cruelty that history books and the news media report, the persuasive explanations that science offers for almost all phenomena once thought mysterious—that church attendance must be taken, at least in the American Northeast, as a willful decision to evade what G. K. Chesterton called "atheist respectability."

To be sure, the church exists in the world. In its centuries of dominance, it had the power to exclude and excommunicate; now, unlike most other organizations, it will take us in if we so much as show up. The weak, the misfit, the outcast are theoretically welcome. It is the last outpost of acceptance. In many a town and neighborhood, the church still functions as a meeting place, and, in its charitable programs, a place of good works, carried out with some conviviality. It is good for your health: a 1999 Duke University study shows that regular churchgoers were twenty-eight per cent less likely to die in a given seven-year period than non-churchgoers. But a church will not last long as merely a health club; other health clubs exist, and other, less demanding means for generating togetherness. The pith and poignance of a church lies in its being a company of believers.

It is difficult to imagine anyone shouldering the implausible complications of Christian doctrine—the Christian story, however pared-down since the days when Italians were painting it into walls of wet plaster—without some inheritance of positive prior involvement. I remember, for instance, taking collection with my father at Wednesday-night Lenten services, not long after we moved from a small town to the country, in southeastern Pennsylvania. Compared with the suburban church where my father had been a Sunday-school teacher and council member, the new church—a brown-steepled sandstone ark that my mother's father had helped build as a young man—drew on a sparse rural population. At these special Wednesday-night services, a scattering of the especially dutiful occupied the creaking Lutheran pews. The basement furnace audibly sighed and clunked as it chewed over the chilly Lenten air. I was fourteen or so, newly (and uncomfortably) confirmed; the dislocation to the country had unsettled me. I was experiencing my growth spurt, and, though never as tall as my father, I felt tall with him as we walked together down the aisle to receive the collection plates. I remember them as wooden and unexpectedly light in the hand, like model airplanes. There may have been a skeleton choir on Wednesday nights, but my memory is of silence as the plate was passed, skidding away down the pew and then returning heavier by a few more bits of paper—dollar bills or Lenten-offering envelopes. Although my head at the time brimmed with non-Christian issues (girls, cartoons, baseball), it was *nice*, I thought, of this church, where my father and I were still near-strangers, to cast the two of us in this responsible, if not highly exalted, role.

My father to the day of his death, more than twenty-five years later, served that church, in various capacities, while I escaped to college and beyond. He was the son of a minister, but he felt that his father had failed in the ministry, having lacked "the call" and the necessary energy. Where many fathers, some of them described in late-Victorian novels, conveyed to their sons an oppressive faith that it was a joy to cast off, my father communicated to me, not with words but with his actions and mournful attitudes, a sense of the Christian religion as something weak and tenuous and in need of rescue. There is a way in which success disagrees with Christianity, and its proper venue is embattlement—a furtive hanging on in the catacombs, or at ill-attended services in dying rural and inner-city parishes. Its perilous, marginal, mocked existence serves as an image of our own, beneath whatever appearance of success is momentarily mustered. At any rate, I had no Oedipal motive to discard it; at college and then in New York City I found my way fitfully to Lutheran services, shunning

"A red-figure volute krater attributed to a painter of the Syleus sequence! Maynard, you shouldn't have!"

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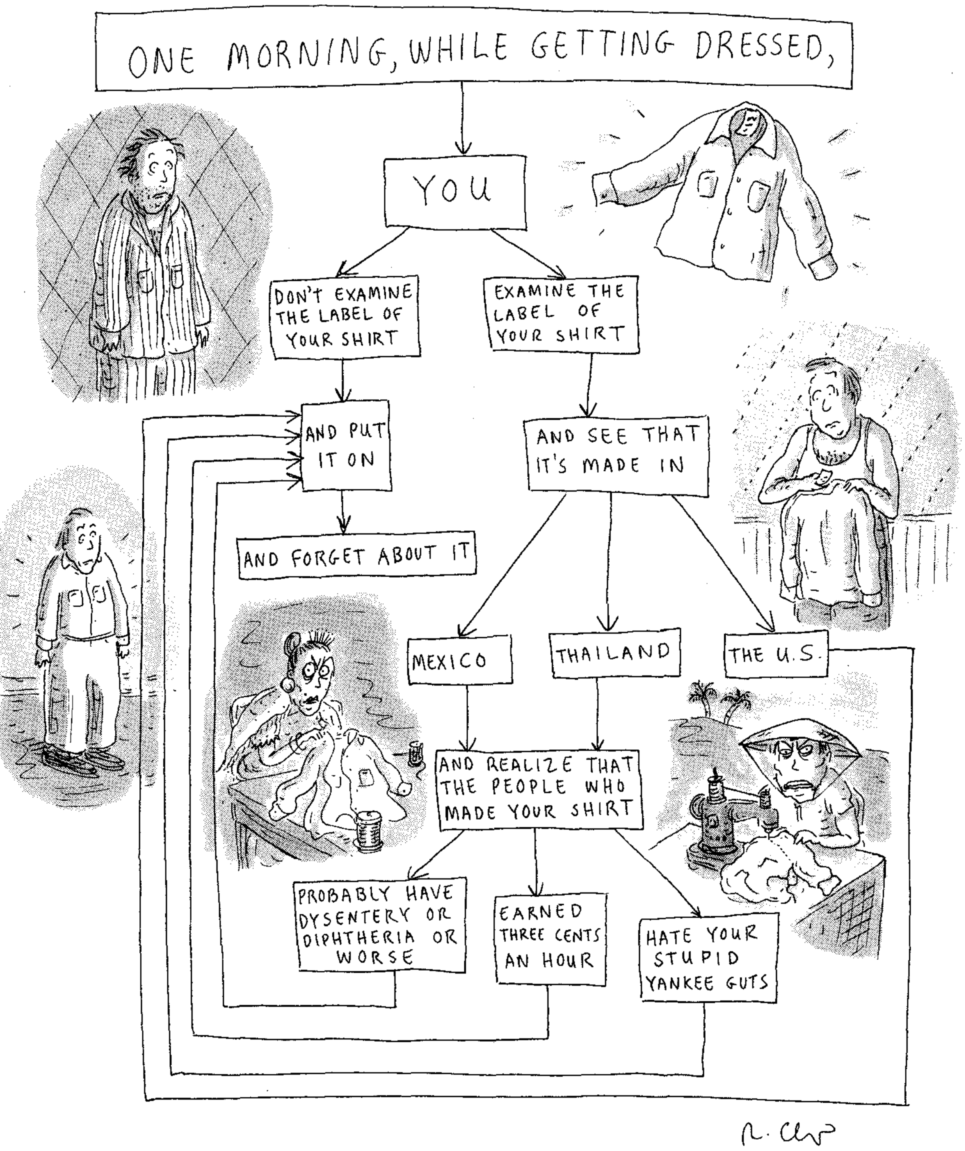

ONE MORNING, WHILE GETTING DRESSED,
YOU
DON'T EXAMINE THE LABEL OF YOUR SHIRT
EXAMINE THE LABEL OF YOUR SHIRT
AND PUT IT ON
AND SEE THAT IT'S MADE IN
AND FORGET ABOUT IT
MEXICO
THAILAND
THE U.S.
AND REALIZE THAT THE PEOPLE WHO MADE YOUR SHIRT
PROBABLY HAVE DYSENTERY OR DIPHTHERIA OR WORSE
EARNED THREE CENTS AN HOUR
HATE YOUR STUPID YANKEE GUTS

deeper involvement but stealing away cleansed and lightened, and taking a certain contrarian pride in participating in ceremonies that, by the wisdom of the world, were profitless and irrational.

Against the terrific tide of rational disbelief must stand an inner sense of contact that is rather cumbersomely signified by terms like “witness” and “knowing Christ,” or a sense, at least, of one’s life being shaped, broadly, by transactions with the supernatural. My mother did not go to the small-town church my father taught Sunday school in; but in 1944, when she took it into her head to buy back the farm where she was born, she made some kind of bargain by whose terms she attended church for the rest of her life—forty-five years’ worth of Sunday mornings. With such a family background of ongoing supernatural transactions, small wonder that I maintained my own Christian connections, which have wound through three Protestant denominations but left little trace, I fear, in the spiritual lives of my children. Some of my grandchildren are not even baptized, thus ending the dogged proprieties of heaven knows how many generations of God-fearing Dutchmen—New Jersey Dutch on my father’s side, Pennsylvania Dutch on my mother’s. My consorts through the years have, I believe, found my going off to church, usually alone, an annoying affectation, and not, as I felt it, a piece of completeness, of the armor in which a good citizen sallies forth: “Since we belong to the day,” Paul wrote the Thessalonians, “let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.”

The Berks County of my childhood was a region where everybody seemed to go to church, the presiding state-sponsored pieties were unquestioned, and the schools and town affairs were all run by Lutheran or Reformed Church deacons. It was not until I moved to New England that I saw people washing their cars in the street on Sunday mornings—blasphemy in broad daylight! For me there has been no other game in the existential arena than the Christian creed, no other answer to the dread that one’s mortal existence brings with it. “I am moved to terror,” Pascal wrote, “like a man transported in his sleep to some terrifying desert island, who wakes up quite lost and with no means of escape.” If this physical world is all, then it is a closed hell in which we are confined, as Pascal said elsewhere, like prisoners in chains, condemned to watch the other prisoners being slain—a hell where art lovers must wander through the Venice Biennale, observing how art holds the mirror up to the grinning face of the post-human.

WHAT might a faith of the future consist of? More of the same, most likely. Religions are conservative artifacts, made from scraps of others. Buddhism is a purification of Hinduism, and Christianity an offshoot of Judaism. Of the religions founded since Christianity, Islam, dating from the seventh century, rephrases Semitic monotheism, paying respect to its earlier embodiments. The Koran states, “God has ordained for you the religion he commended unto Noah and which we have revealed to thee and we commended unto Abraham and Moses and Jesus,” and enjoins the faithful to say to “the People of the Book” (Jews and Christians), “Our God and your God are one.” Whatever its present totalitarian tendencies, Islam began as non-exclusivist and, for long eras, in many places, maintained a toleration of other faiths that Christianity could not match. Sikhism, founded in the late fifteenth century, numbers twenty million adherents, centered in the East Punjab, and combines Islamic and

Hindu beliefs as formulated by its founder, Nanak, in a book of holy writings called the Guru Granth Sahib. Bahaism emerged in nineteenth-century Persia out of the Shiite branch of Islam: a young man claimed to be the Bab, the "gate" of divine guidance, and was executed at the age of thirty. After his death, a disciple, Bahaullah, proclaimed himself one of a series of divine manifestations that also includes Jesus, Muhammad, Zoroaster, and the Buddha—quite a roster. The six million Bahais are scattered over the globe, most thickly in Iran, where they are persecuted.

Two Asian sects have recently troubled the governments of Japan and China, making headlines. Aum Shinrikyo, the Japanese cult indicted for planting poison gas in Tokyo subways, professes to practice a primitive or fundamental form of Buddhism, naming Lord Shiva, god of destruction and regeneration, as its highest god. Its head, Shoko Asahara, a former acupuncturist who is now in jail, stresses "freedom from illness" in his teachings, and claims to be able to levitate as well as heal. Distinctly modern, perhaps, is the cult's attempt to bring on the apocalypse by killing people with the nerve gas sarin, and by such devout gadgetry as the Perfect Salvation cap, a piece of headgear containing electrodes attached to a six-volt battery; it is designed to bring the wearer's brain waves into synch with Asahara's. His followers were also privileged, when he was at liberty, to kiss his big toe and to pay upward of two hundred dollars for a drink of his used bathwater.

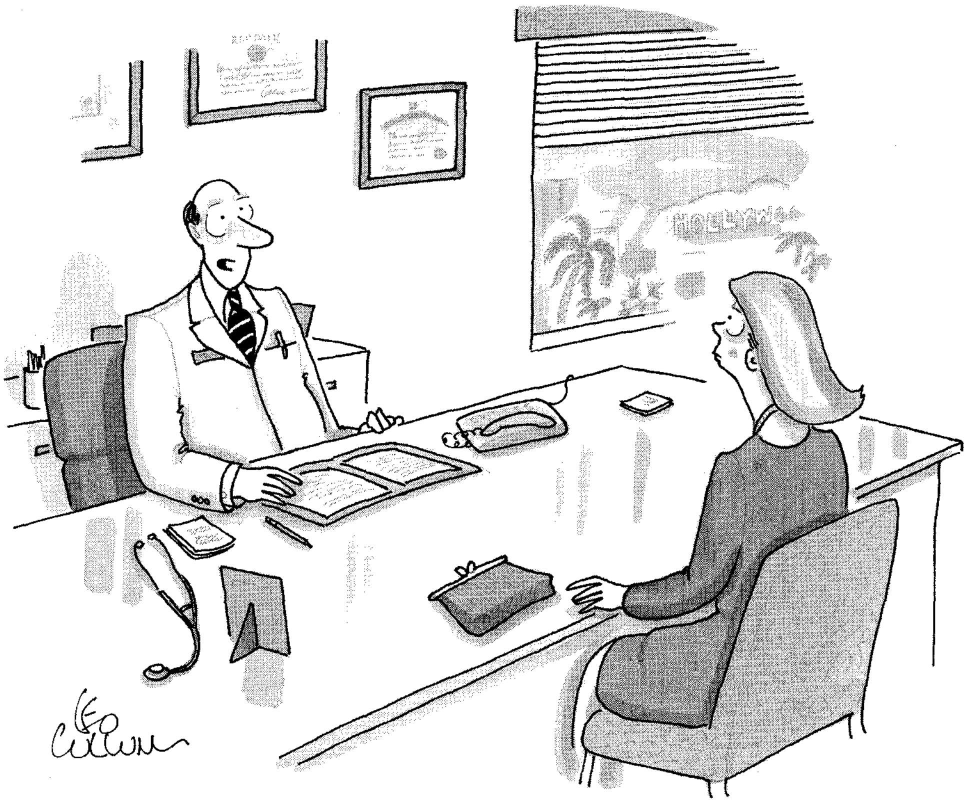
Beleaguered Aum numbers its membership merely in the thousands; Falun Gong, the Chinese movement so big that it has attracted a government ban, is estimated to have as many as seventy million followers. Meaning "Wheel of the Law," Falun Gong proposes a mystical wheel that rotates in the lower abdomen, curing disease and physical decay; its adherents perform outdoor exercises closely related to the ancient practice of qi gong, the use of breathing exercises to regulate the life force within the body. Harmless and venerable these practices might seem to be, but the government calls the sect subversive, alleging that it advocates such disturbing ideas as "global doomsday" and "earth explosion," inducing some followers to insanity and suicide. Its founder, Li Hongzhi, lives in New York City exile, and exerts his sway via the Internet—an up-to-date touch.

The creation of new religions is circumscribed by the same dispassionate developments in science which wounded and weakened the old ones. Since Galileo, astronomy has had cosmology ever firmer in hand, and the present picture of the universe is dispiriting—a hugely prolonged, one-way, apparently accelerating expansion toward the unthinkably diffuse dispersal of energy. Stars will cease forming, and eventually all will wink out; the black holes will evaporate, and, in an ever thinner soup of subatomic particles, individual positrons and electrons will seek to annihilate each other, forming inwardly spiralling mutual orbits over distances many times greater than the span of the present observable universe. According to Paul Davies's "The Last Three Minutes":

> Their orbits would be many trillions of light-years in diameter! The particles would move so slowly that they would take a million years to travel a centimeter. So sluggish would the electrons and positrons have become that the spiral time works out at a staggering 10^{116} years. Nevertheless, the final fate of these positronium atoms is sealed from the moment they form.

A few scientists have tried to find cheer in even this gigantically bleak scenario. In a 1979 paper, the physicist Freeman Dyson proposed that intelligent life of some futuristic sort could survive into a virtual eternity, by slowing its metabolism and rate of thought to match the environment and conserving its energy with long periods of hibernation. A discussion of Dyson's proposals, by Lawrence M. Krauss and Glenn D. Starkman in this month's issue of *Scientific American*, argues that the alarm clocks needed to time wakeup calls so widely spaced would run into the limits of quantum mechanics, and that the quality of life enjoyed by these hypothetically immortal organisms would be more hellish than heavenly: "All organisms would ever do is relive the past, having the same thoughts over and over again."

Frank Tipler, professor of mathematical physics at Tulane University, goes Dyson one better. In his large, formula- and graph-ridden "The Phys-



"You need a transplant, but there are very few good parts for middle-aged women."

ics of Immortality” (1994), he predicts, by what he insists is pure scientific deduction, an end-time when life will have “engulfed” the entire universe, milked the heat differential between various parts of it for “shear energy,” and computerized everything. A God-like entity called the Omega Point will, for benevolent reasons that slipped by me, resurrect us all as computer simulations: “The dead will be resurrected when the computer capacity of the universe is so large that the amount of capacity required to store all possible human simulations is an insignificant fraction of the entire capacity.”

These ideas already figured in the last chapter of a book that Tipler wrote with John D. Barrow, “The Anthropic Cosmological Principle” (1986). The physical universe is unlikely, in a sense: to be stable and long-lived enough to provide time for intelligent life to evolve, it required a number of long-odds happy coincidences among the physical constants, from the Big Bang’s expansion rate to, subatomically, the fine-structure constant and the strength of the weak interaction. The “anthropic principle,” in its strongest form, holds therefore that the universe was designed to create us; it does not say why an omnipotent God would choose to breed an intelligent species by such a lengthy, wasteful, and cruel method as evolution. Theistic exercises in science and logic, from Aristotle to Aquinas to Deism, may fortify the already persuaded but will not convert disbelievers. Anyway, a God who could be proved would be an unescapable tyrant, an inert datum. No religion is apt to be founded on cold reason. It takes faith out of the equation. Belief, like love, must be voluntary.

Perhaps the religion of the future lies all about us, in the proliferating escapism and induced hysteria of “entertainment,” with all the intimidating, mind-blowing enlargement that electronic media have made possible. We are surrounded by entertainment more completely than medieval man was by the church and its propaganda. Feeling despondent and lonely? Turn on the television set. It is really hard to believe, after a while, that Tom Brokaw is not your friend—that he does not see you, and love you as you love him. To many an impoverished shut-in, the apparitions of television are realer than the priest and the social worker. People pray to Elvis; the Beatles were bigger than Jesus, as John Lennon pointed out before his celebrity brought martyrdom.

If the neural wiring that determines the religious instinct is “hard,” it is not surprising that religions have so strong a family resemblance. Buddhism, proposing a sublimated godhead and an end to craving, sprouted idols and an elaborate afterlife. “Why are you all here?” the minister of a Congregational church asked me and the rest of his skimpy flock one Sunday morning. “Because you want to live forever!” Freud, in a typically laden paragraph of “Civilization and Its Discontents,” puts it all sternly in place. “Religion,” he says,

> imposes equally on everyone its own path to the acquisition of happiness and protection from suffering. Its technique consists in depressing the value of life and distorting the picture of the real world in a delusional manner—which presupposes an intimidation of the intelligence. At this price, by forcibly fixing them in a state of psychical infantilism and by drawing them into a mass-delusion, religion succeeds in sparing many people an individual neurosis. But hardly anything more.

It has always struck me that Freud did not think being spared neurosis amounted to much. And that he saw religion as “depressing the value of life.” William James—little more of a believer than Freud—saw it as the enhancer of life: “Let Heaven smile upon the earth, and deities pay their visits; let faith and hope be the atmosphere which man breathes in;—and his days pass by with zest; they stir with prospects, they thrill with remoter values.”

Gahan Wilson

“I wish you’d get into the spirit of this thing, Brewster!”

“The Varieties of Religious Experience” assembled a mass of testimony to give its readers what James called “the right to believe.” Personal testimony is the empirical style of American religion, and it would be a shy essayist who came up with none. When half my present age, I was at a New England women’s college to give a reading and judge a poetry contest, and was seized by terror. The nubile students’ youth, innocence, and gentle appetite to know and be known struck me as amazing and monstrous, given that we were all poised above the chasm—suddenly quite vivid to me—of our eventual deaths. Numbly I went through my professorial performance, and in the dormitory room to which I had been assigned prepared to pass the night with my terror. I had suffered such episodes before; it is as if one had been suddenly flayed of the skin of habit and herd feeling that customarily enwraps and deadens our deep predicament. I later assigned this experience to a fictional character, a Jewish character, though it may be a Christian-specific form of harrowing. In my dorm room, I noticed a small shelf of books, and one of the books, on the page I opened it to, directly addressed my sensations, offering, in plain and friendly language, various mental easements. It was, I suppose, self-help, with a pious flavor—not the sort of book I usually read or respected. Ungratefully enough, I have forgotten the title and the author; nor did I have any desire to take the volume with me. The shamefulness of my impotent, grovelling anxiety attached to the book that allayed it. Yet its readiness to hand remains uncanny. I slept after reading a number of pages. They got me through the night. The next day I was still scared, but in an achy, stiff-moving way, like muscles after too much exercise.

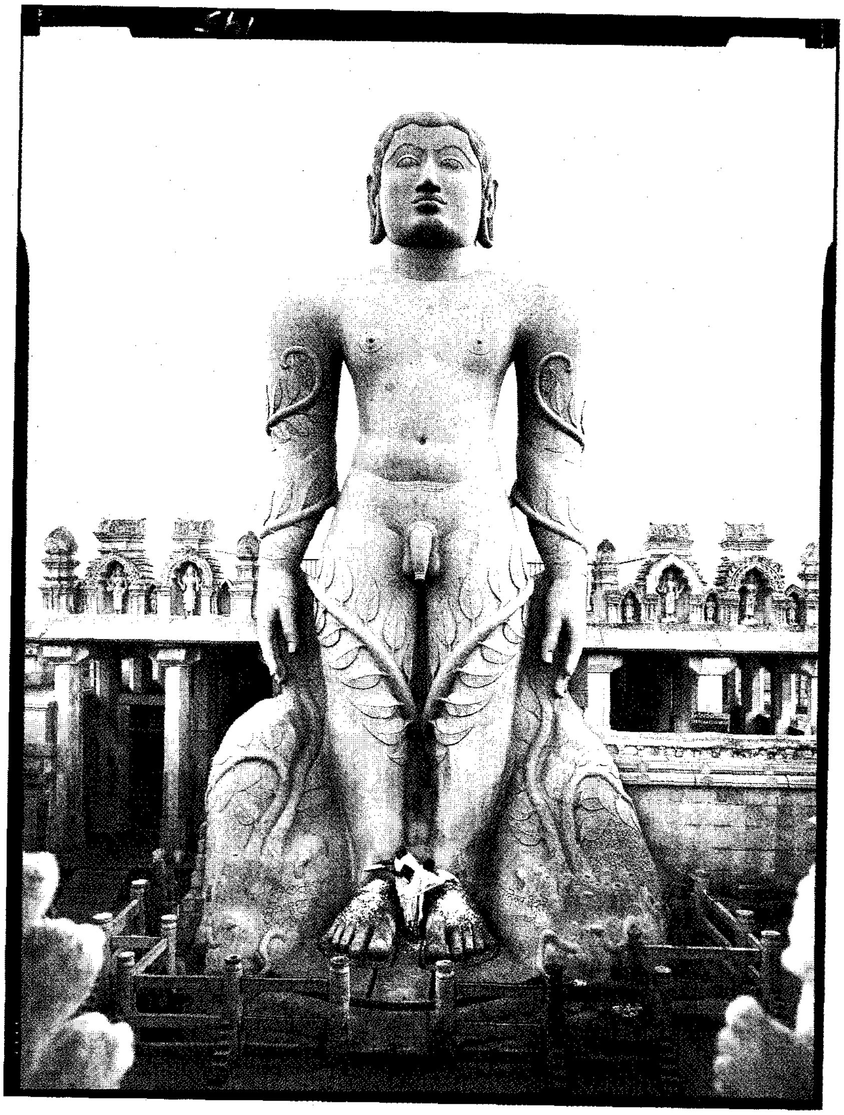
"Please be patient with me, Christopher. The arts are an important part of my life!"

• •

And a few weeks ago, in Florence, in a hotel near the Duomo, I woke in the night, and felt in the strange room fearful and adrift, failed, near my life's end, a wide-awake mote in an alien, sleeping city. Part of my desolation, let me additionally confess, was my having consented, against my better judgment, to write this piece on the future of faith. The attempt felt dangerous; I feared it might empty out of me the last drops of what feeble faith had got me this far. To relieve my loneliness, I prayed, asking to be allowed to sleep, without expecting the prayer to be answered, I felt so taut—a needle floating on the surface tension of a glass of still water.

But then, getting up to go to the bathroom, I became aware of noise, a rustling all around me, closer and faster, and then thunder's blanketing boom, repeated. I went to the window. The room had a diagonal view of the Duomo—the hub of Florence, and the fourth-largest church in Christendom. While I watched, the rain intensified, rattling on tile roofs near and far; it looked like rods of metal in the floodlight that illumined part of the Duomo's red-tiled dome. Lightning. Hectic gusts. The rain was furious. I was not alone in the universe. The rippling rods of rain drove down upon the vertical beam of light at the base of the giant dome as if to demolish it; but the bulb, its pillar of light, the hulking old cathedral crouched like a stoic mute dragon, the thick tiles and gurgling gutters around me all could withstand the soaking, the thunder, the shuddering flashes of light. I was filled with a glad sense of exterior activity. God was at work—at ease, even. My wife woke up, admired the tempestuous spectacle with me, and went back to bed. I lay down beside her and fell asleep amid the comforting, busy, self-careless drumming. All this felt like a transaction, a rescue.

The future is not just an extension of the past; like a particle being measured, it eludes prediction. Judaism and Christianity are both religions of waiting—waiting in one case for the Messiah, in the other for the Messiah's Second Coming. Christian time is an interim, which has stretched longer than the prophets and early saints expected. Something might happen in faith's future. Science might come up with a surprise—a loophole among the quarks or a reinstatement of the cosmological constant. Or the dynamic of human nature, as Earth's population rolls past six billion, might produce a qualitative change in the frame of faith, of the world's tired, grotesque, irreplaceable faiths. What occurs won't be easily intelligible—the Gospels took most of a century to get written—but the yearning, the insistence that there be, to again quote William James, "something more," will persist. Our concepts of art and virtue, purpose and justification are so tied up with the supernatural that it is hard to foresee doing altogether without it. ♦

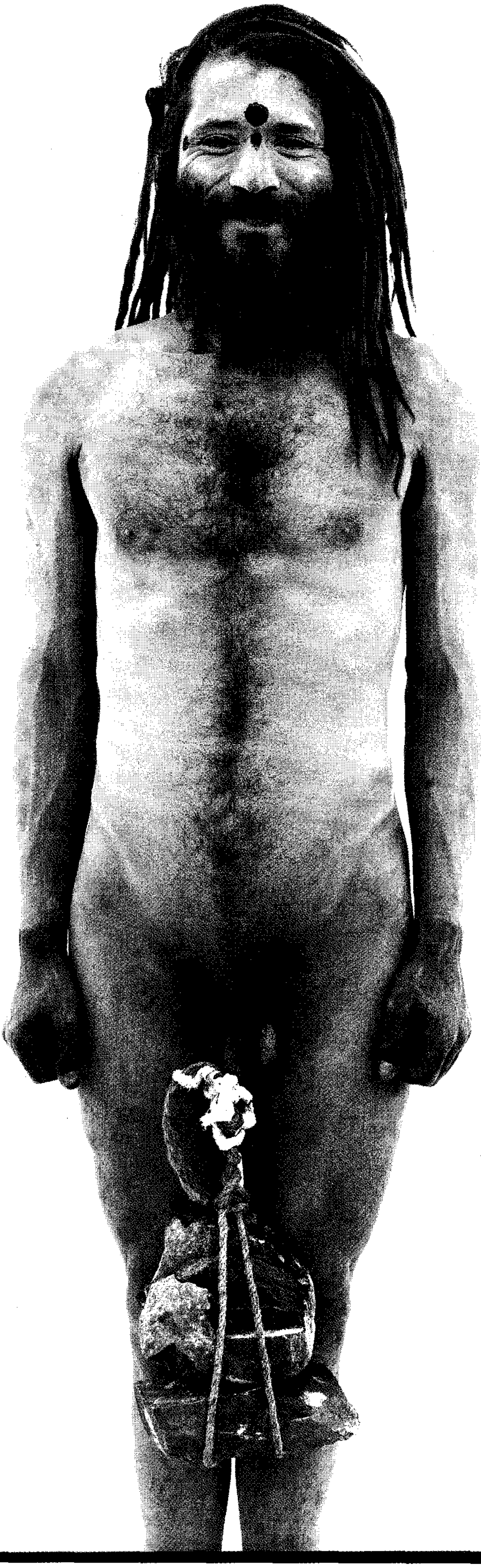


REVELATIONS

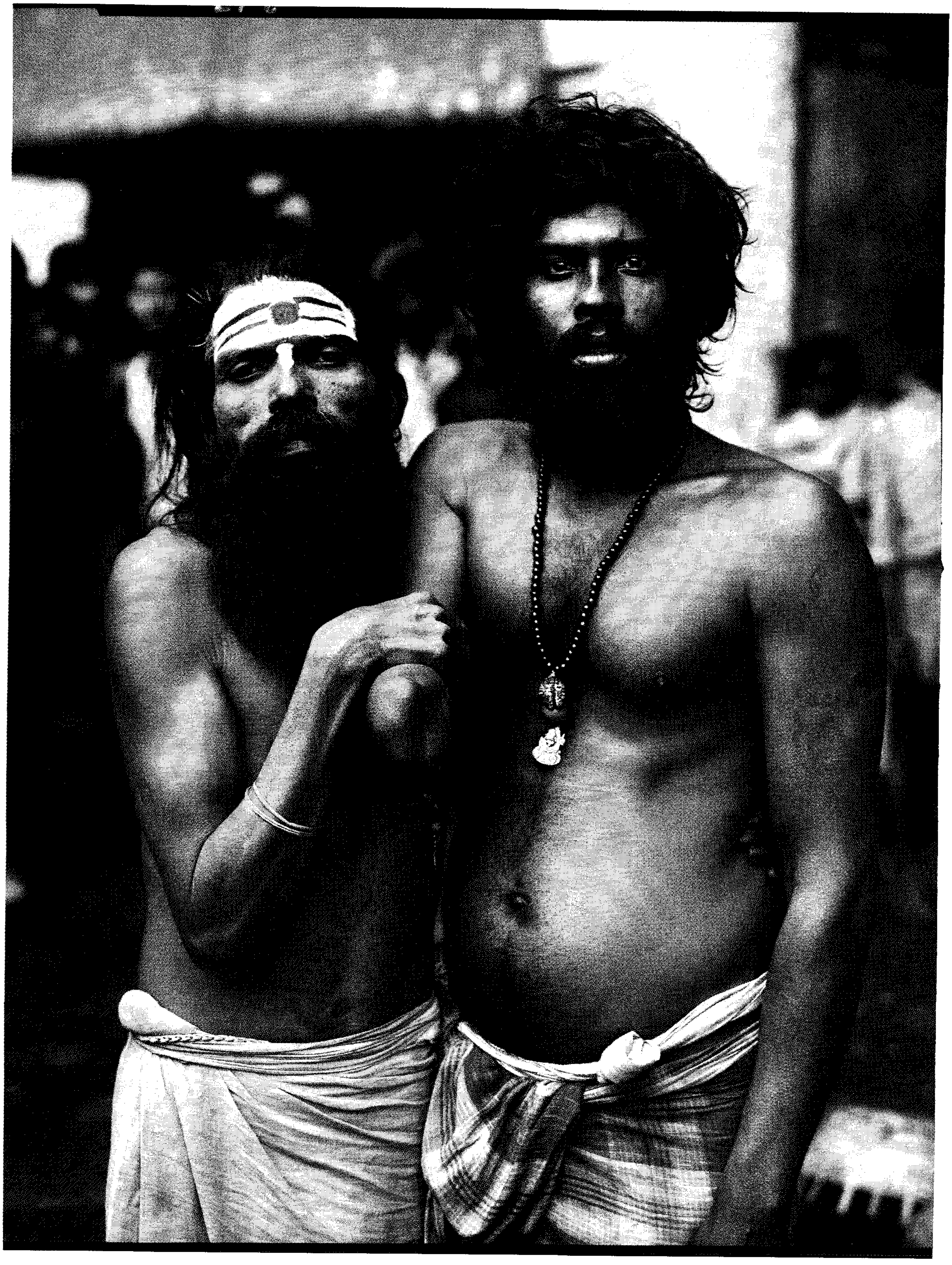
A work in progress.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RICHARD AVEDON

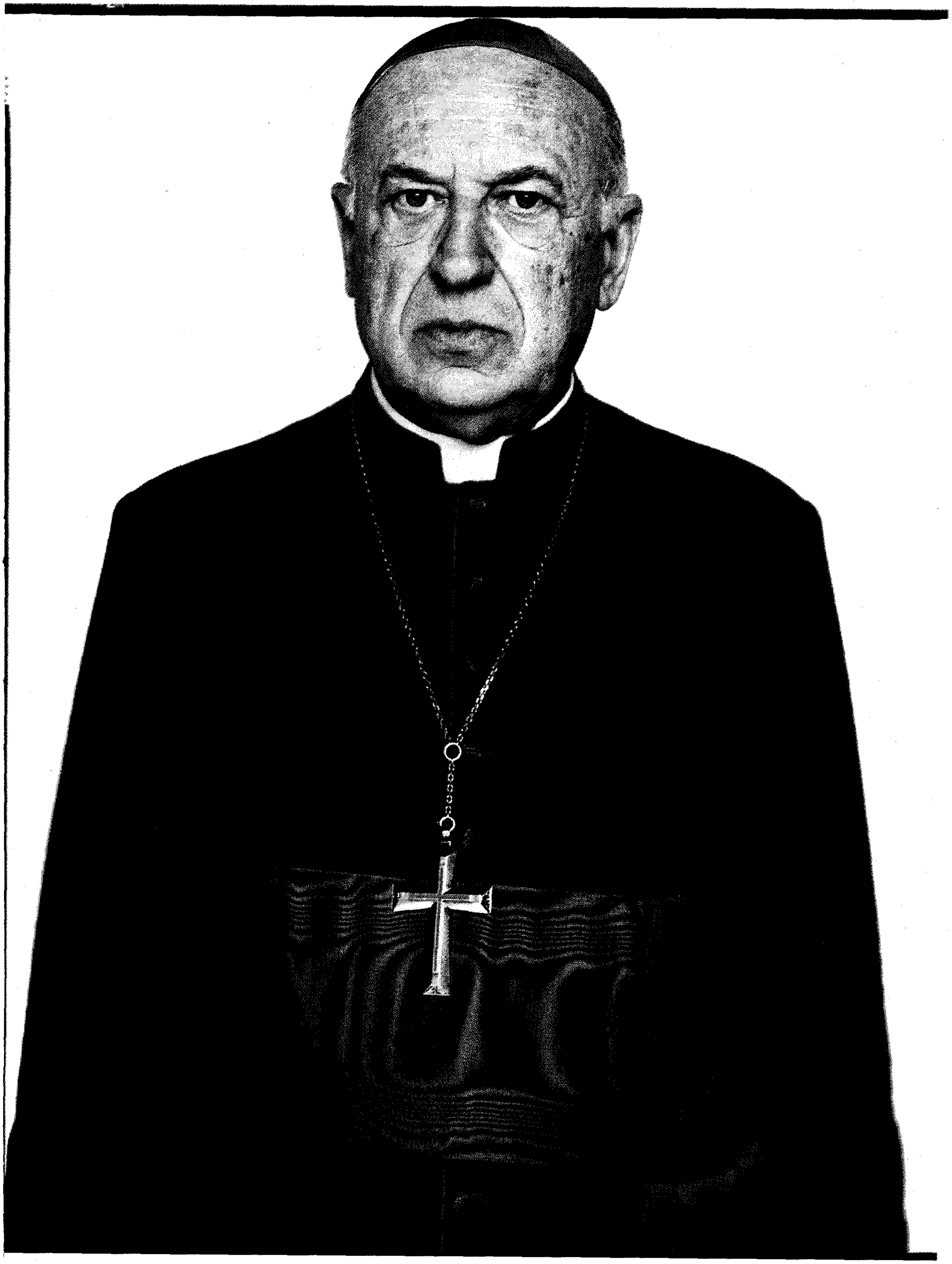
Tenth-century statue of the Jain saint Gomateshwara, in Sravanabelagola, India, January, 1998.



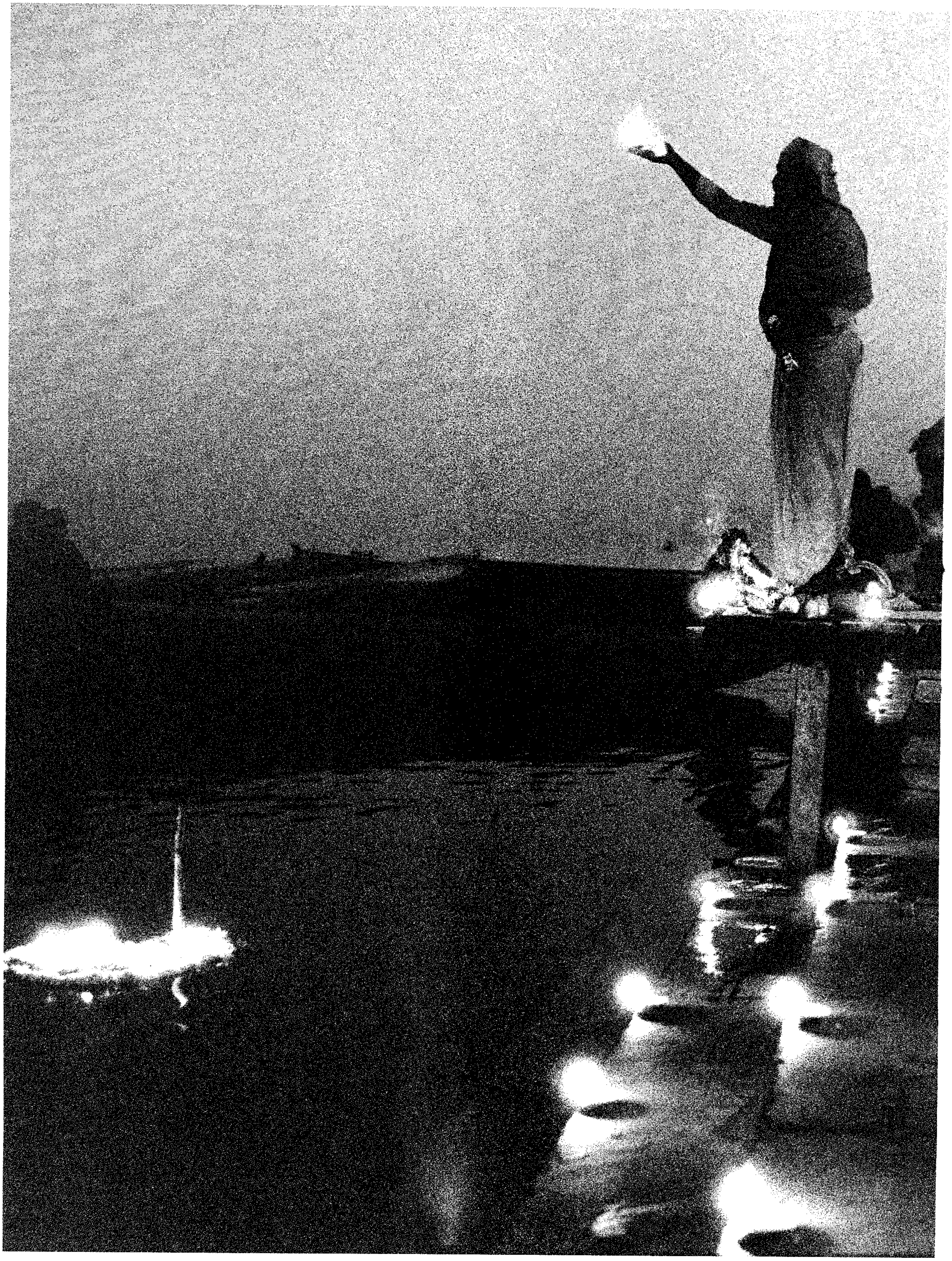
A Naga holy man, at the Kumbh Mela Festival, in Haridwar, India, March, 1998.



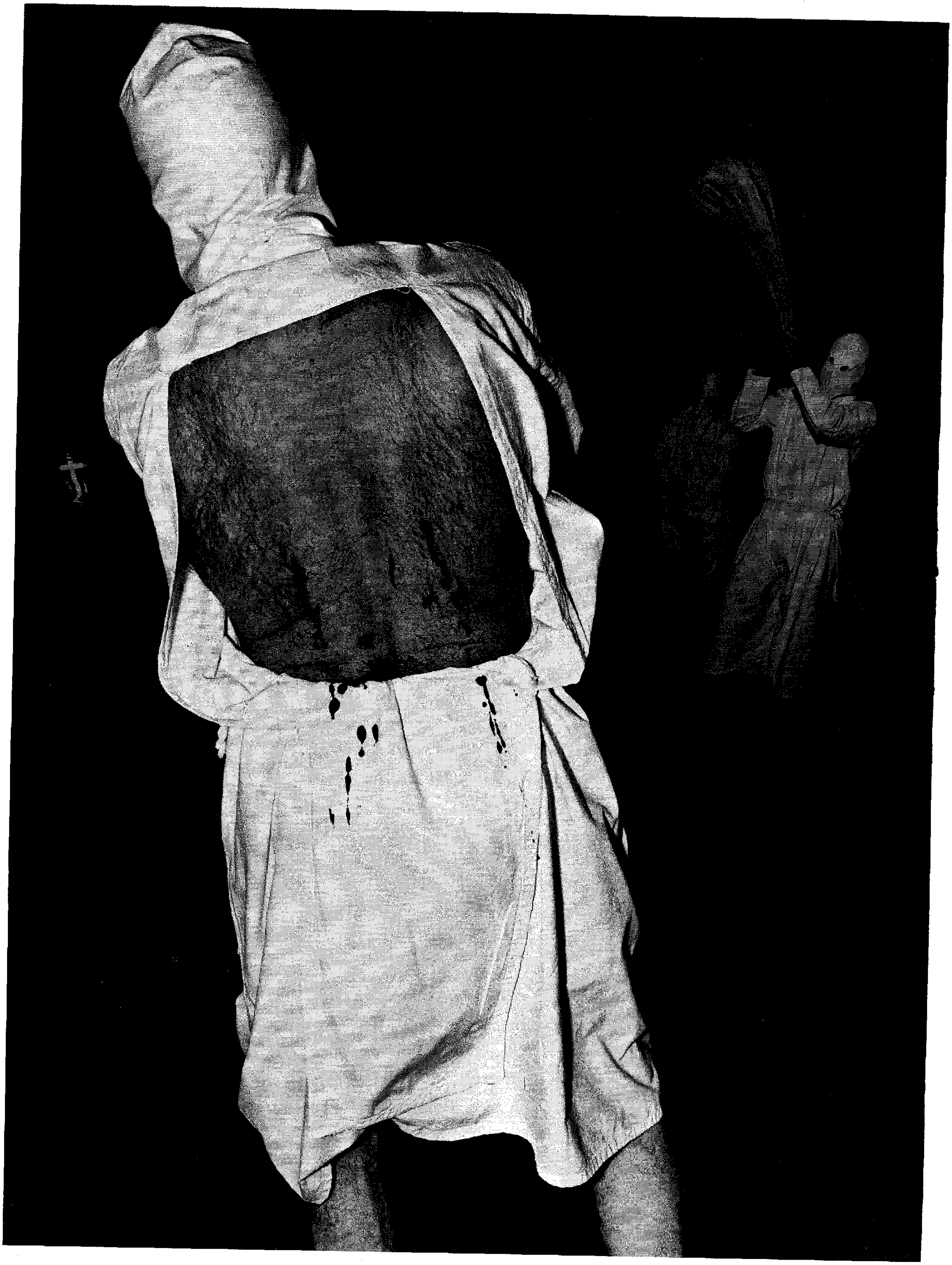
A Shiva devotee and a mendicant in Calcutta, January, 1998.

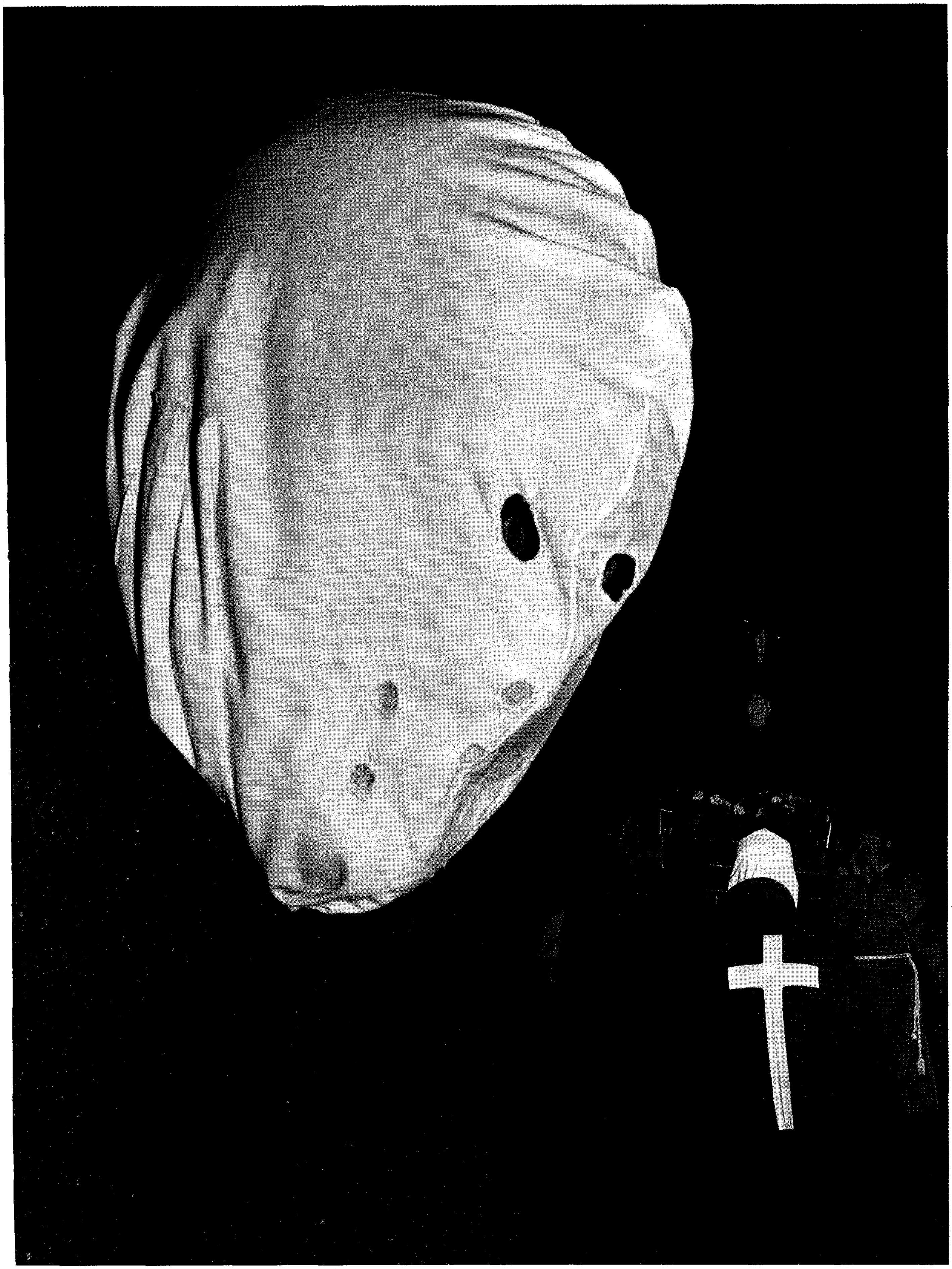


His Eminence Cardinal Lorenzo Antonetti, the administrator of the Vatican's properties and investments, in Rome, June, 1998.

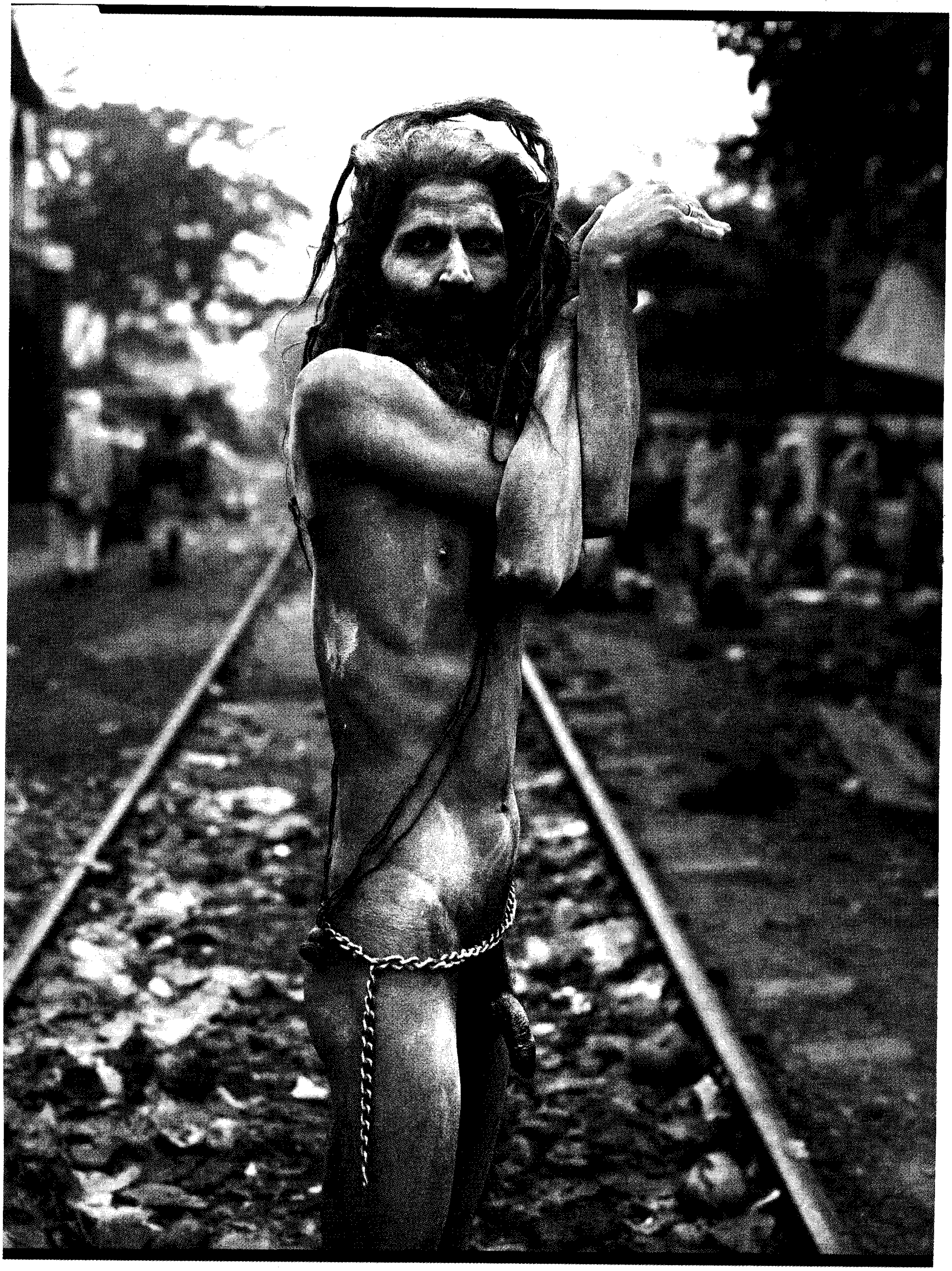


Evening prayers on the west bank of the Ganges, in Varanasi, India, January, 1998.



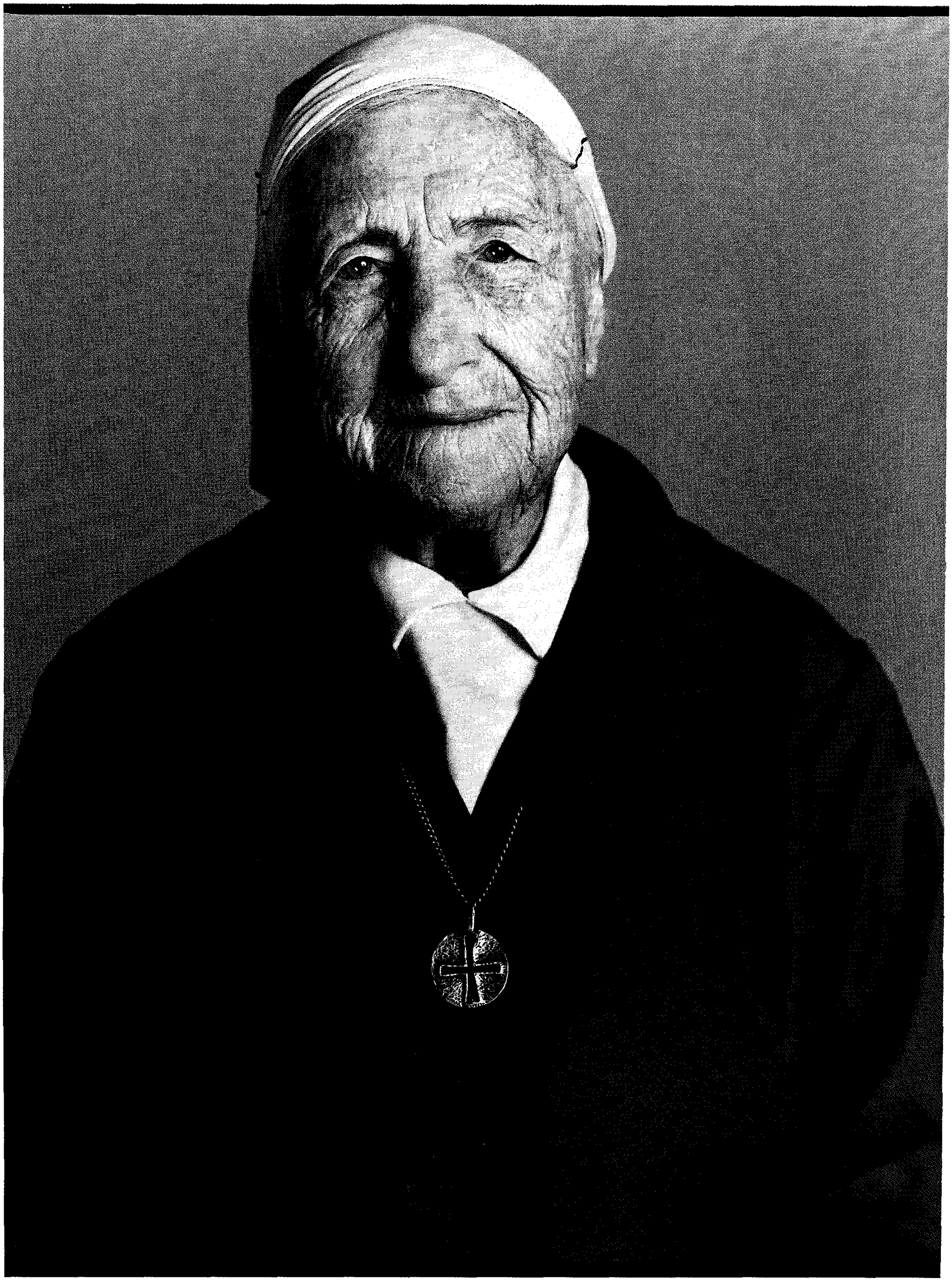


Flagellants in San Vicente de la Sonsierra, Spain, Good Friday, 1998.



A Naga holy man in Calcutta, January, 1998.

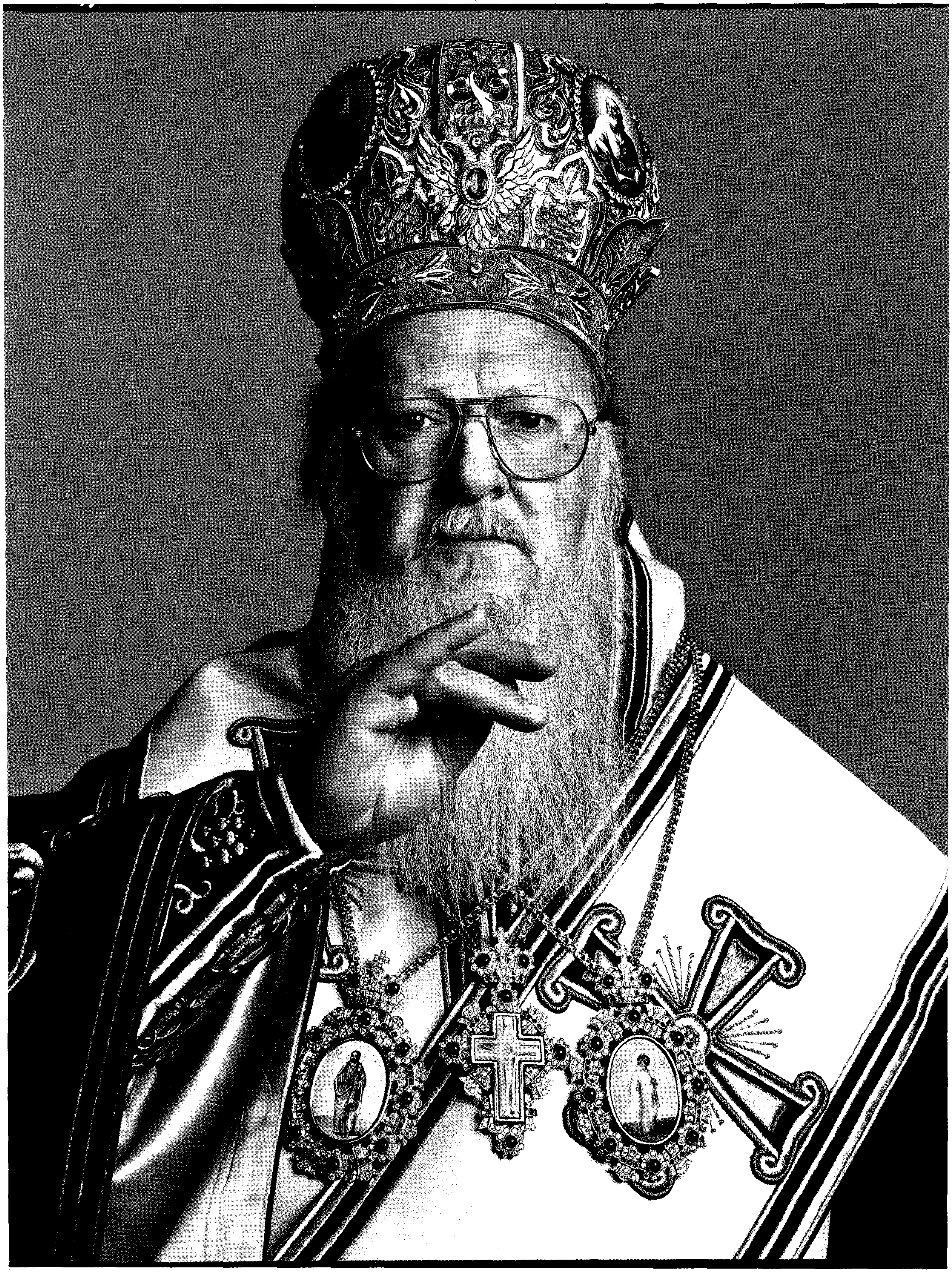
The author Nirad Chaudhuri, at the age of a hundred, in Oxford, England, March, 1998.



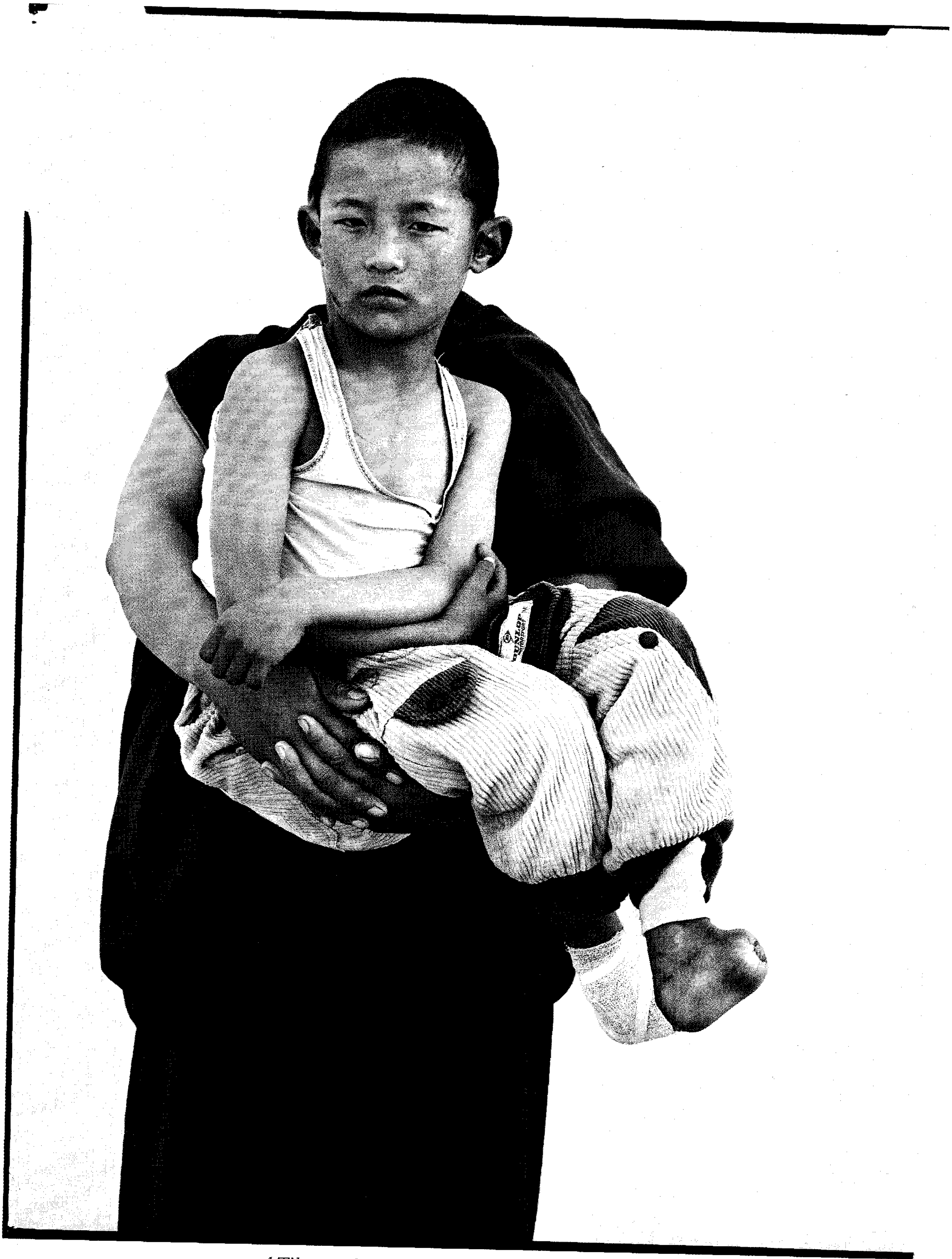
Soeur Emmanuelle, of the Order of Our Lady of Sion, in Paris, June, 1998.

Muslim women in Varanasi, India, January, 1998.

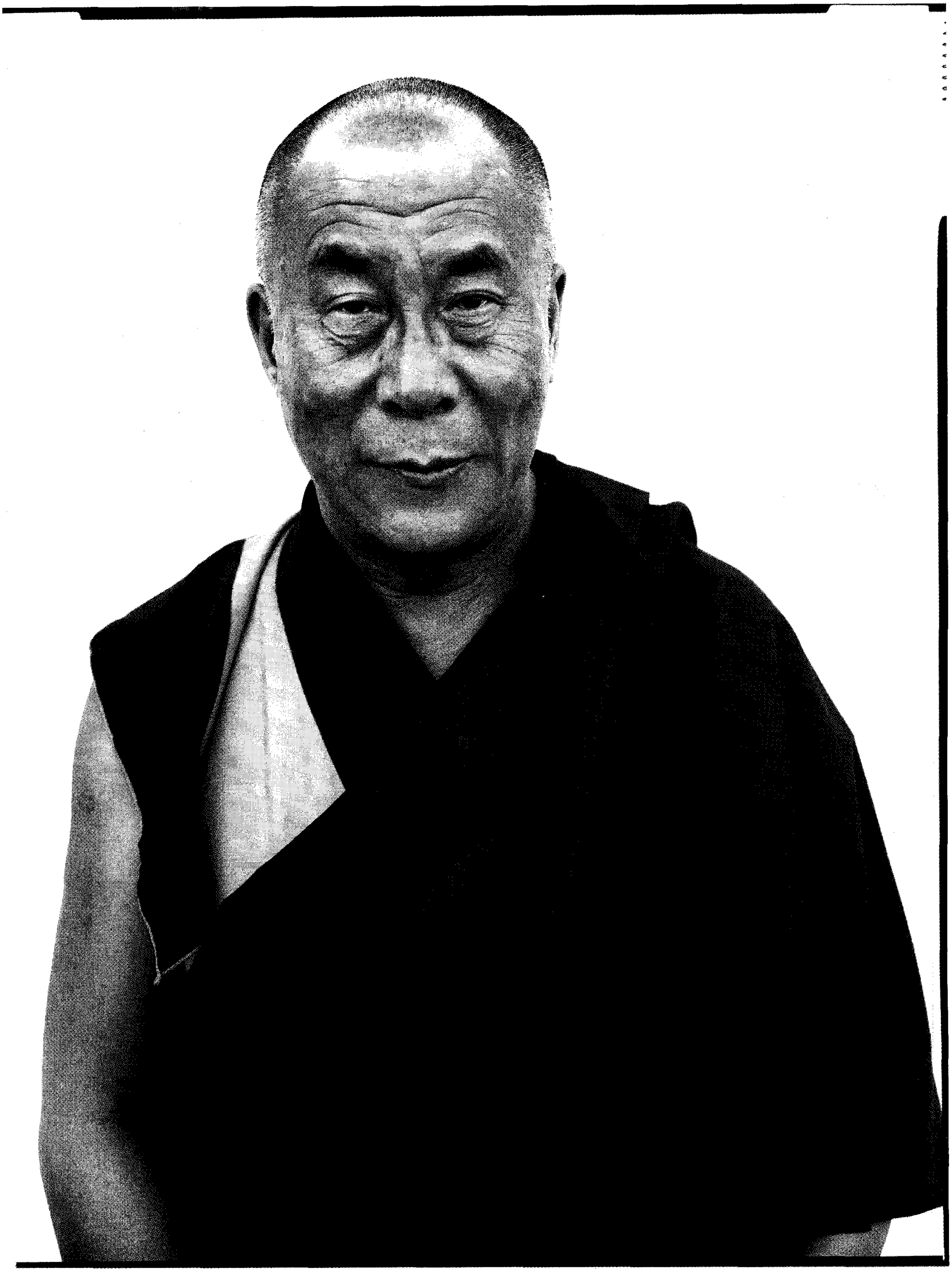
Funeral pyre at the burning ghat, in Varanasi, India, January, 1998.



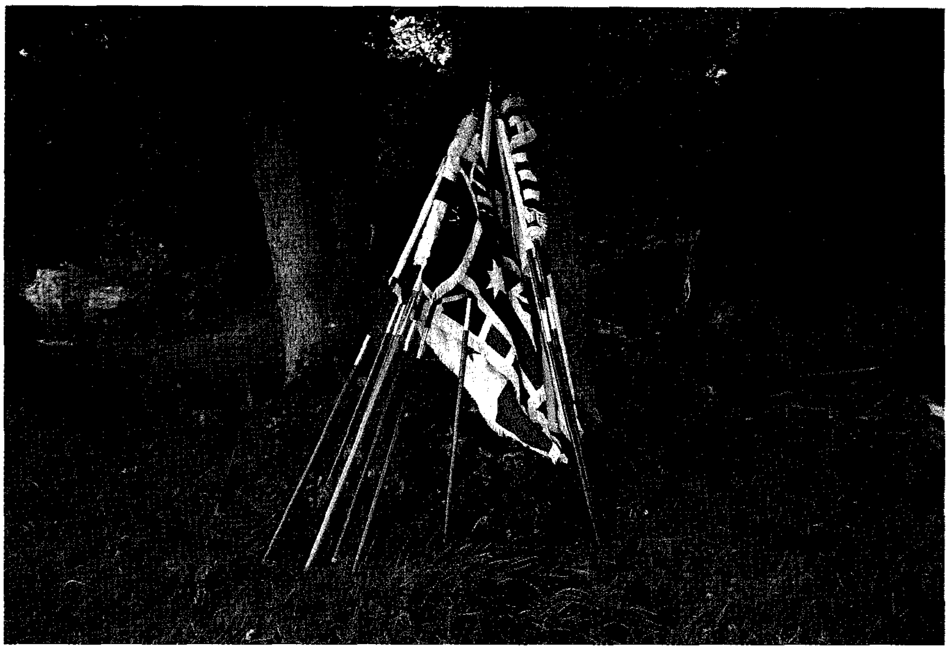
His All Holiness Bartholomew, Archbishop of Constantinople, and the Ecumenical Patriarch, in Pittsburgh, November, 1997.



A Tibetan refugee boy in Dharamsala, India, January, 1998.



His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, at the Gyume Tantric Monastery, in Karnataka, India, January, 1998.



GILLES PERESS, "TWELFTH OF JULY, ON THE FIELD AT FINAGHY"/MAGNUM

FICTION

WOOD

A small act of betrayal.

BY COLUM McCANN

IT was just past nighttime when we brought the logs down to the mill. The storm was finished, but there was still snow on the hedges and it looked like they had white eyebrows.

Mammy drove the red tractor down the lane. The headlights were off, and she kept the throttle steady so Daddy wouldn't hear us. She was wrapped in two coats, and I had my brown duffel closed to the neck, but still the wind was cold.

The logs were tied with chains to keep them from slipping, but the chains rattled like they were nervous, too, and I held my breath. The light from Daddy's room was on, even though he was sleeping. It sprayed yellow onto the snow at the back of the house.

Mammy pushed the throttle forward, and the tractor quickened a little on the hill. The sound of the engine was like a cough rising. She turned in the seat to see if all the logs were following. I was walking behind and I gave her a wave, and she smiled and turned again.

All the clouds had disappeared, and the moon looked like a coin that had been tossed in the sky. The snow had frozen, and it crunched under my feet. My boots made footprints in the tracks left by the pulled wood. The boots were size 8s that Daddy had bought in Belfast long ago. They were much too big for me, and I could feel the newspaper shifting in the toes.

I wanted to sit on the end of the logs and have the tractor skid me along. We used to have a small wooden cart, and before Daddy got sick he'd skid us through the fields on the end of a rope. We laughed and shouted hard then, me and my brothers. Sometimes he dragged us along through the mud, all the way down to the church. Once he pulled the cart too hard and we slammed into a tree. I cut my head and it bled down my chin, but I didn't go to the hospital. Daddy said I was a big enough lad, not to cry like a girl, but he carried me all the way home. He had wide shoulders then, not hunched into himself like an old raven.

THE man with the big red car had called at the door three days before. He had gray hair and a gray suit and a Union Jack button in his lapel. His face was very tight, like someone had squished it together with pliers. He told Mammy that there had been a fire in the Orange Lodge and that it was an emergency. All the poles and banners for marching season had been burned. They needed new ones right quick, but they didn't want to use the Kavanagh mill at the other side of town. Forty poles, he said. Twenty-five shillings each. They had to be special. Smooth and varnished and nicely rounded at the top.

Mammy took a deep breath and looked out at the mill over the man's shoulder. The lock was still on the mill door. The man shifted from foot to foot and coughed a few times, and then he said Mammy's name.

I was sure that Mammy was going to say no, thanks. Ever since Daddy got sick she said no, thanks, to every job—she said we got enough money from the checks in the post. But this time she wrung her hands together, and finally she whispered, O.K.

Your husband'll be all right with that, then? the man asked.

He will, aye.

He was never mad keen before, was he?

Mammy said nothing, but she looked behind her as if she expected Daddy to be listening.

The man just smiled and said, Next week so?

Aye, next Thursday.

Mammy closed the door, and the man drove away. She went and sat in the swivel chair in the living room, blew air out from her lips. Not a word, she said to me, not a single word.

She went upstairs to Daddy's room, and I followed her and stood by the door.

Who was that? I heard him ask.

Nobody, love.

It was a very long visit for nobody, Daddy said.

Sure, nobody visits here all the time, she said.

And what's that mean? he said.

Daddy's voice was big and messy, but Mammy's was small, and I had to press my ear close to the door to hear what she was saying.

I'm just joking with you, love, she said.

When she came out, she put her hand on my back and made me go to my room. It's our secret, she said.

Daddy doesn't like the marches. He says that he's as good a Presbyterian as the next, and what's the use of singing and shouting and banging drums? That's for the loudmouths, he says, their banners and whistles and trombones and all. He says it's meanness that celebrates others dying and people should just be peaceful and listen to God and then the world would be a much better place.

We don't have a television, but I've seen marching pictures in the newspaper. There were lots of people on the street, and they were laughing and smiling and carrying big banners. I didn't understand why Daddy said what he said about the marches, but Mammy never said anything at all. She always just nodded when Daddy talked. If we asked a question, she'd say, Ask your daddy. And when we'd ask why, she'd say, Because your daddy said so. And when we'd ask why again, she'd say, Careful now, or I'll have your daddy give you a good hiding.

But he can't give us a hiding anymore. He stays in bed reading his Bible. Sometimes he thumps the wall with his shoulder, and once Mammy found him hitting the back of his head on the bedpost and she had to go in and hold him until he stopped. He was shouting swear words, and she was saying shush shush shush there there there love. Afterward, we all went into his room, sat on the bed beside him, and said big long prayers, and Daddy told us he was sorry for shouting like that, the Devil got into his throat.

THE doors to the mill were open, and Mammy drove the tractor inside. The sound of the tractor was different now, softer, tires rolling over sawdust. I pulled the string for the lights and it flooded the mill, and suddenly there was dust all around us. The snow on the sleeves of my coat melted and ran down to my elbows, where it made me shiver.

A few empty bottles of lemonade were on the workbenches, where Daddy had left them long ago. My throat felt dry. I thought about running into the house to get some milk from the fridge, but Mammy said, Come on now, Sam.

She closed the door of the mill, clapped her hands together twice, and said, Let's get cracking.

We unwrapped the chains from the logs. Mammy had thin little woollen gloves on, and she took them off and offered them to me, but I said no, thanks. She reached into her pocket, took out some matches, went across to the kerosene heaters. When she struck the match, it looked like there was fire jumping from her hands. In a few minutes, the mill was heating.

Mammy looked out the window, but the yard was empty except for the tracks we had left in the snow. She rubbed her nose on her glove and tapped at the windowpane.

Sometimes your daddy gets a notion, she said.

Aye, I said.

It's only poles, you know.

Aye.

She stayed looking out the window. She was like a black shadow against it. I saw some bats outside. They dipped around and went very fast. At last she turned around, and her eyes were red and puffy.

But he's a good man, she said.

He is, aye.

She took the chain saw down off the wall and said, Stand back. She fired it up, and the metal teeth ripped around the blade. I put pressure on the log so it would saw quicker, and then she made a V cut. She cut the log into three long sections, and there was a bead of sweat on her forehead.

How long will it take? I asked.

A few days, she said.

We bent down to lift the piece of log into the cutting machine. The wood was wet where Mammy had sawed it, and I could feel it ooze down my fingers. We were breathing hard when we got the log in place. Mammy hit the switch, and the sharp blade ran down the middle of the log. When you cut trees, you can tell how old they are by the number of rings, and I wondered would I be able to tell things about myself if I cut myself open, but I didn't say anything.

Mammy was staring into the machine. Do you think the pieces are too thick? she said.

No, I said, they're perfect, though I wasn't sure.

Right so, she said, and gave me a small smile, and she looked pretty, like she does in old photographs.

We took the first piece to the rounding machine, and Mammy spent a long time making sure that everything was adjusted right, the blades, the buttons, the oil. The wood spun around and around in the machine, and bits came flying off until it began to look like a pole. There was a great smell of timber in the air. Mammy turned off the machine and ran her fingers along the wood, and then she turned to me.

Will you get the thingamajig ready there, love? she asked. She was pointing at the sanding machine. I ran across and got it. It wasn't heavy.

Plug it in there, good lad, she said.

A little blue spark jumped out from the wall where the plug was, like lightning.

THE day Daddy fell, he went down between two sawhorses. My brothers and me were playing hide-and-go-seek in the courtyard. Roger found him and shouted to come quick to the mill, and I ran as fast as I could.

Daddy was there with his eyes wide open. He had a piece of sandpaper in his hands, and his hair was covered in dust. He was trying to move, but he couldn't.

He'd been making chairs when it happened. Daddy used to make the most beautiful chairs in the whole of Britain. Any man or woman, Mammy said, would be proud to sit in one of his

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chairs; they were fit for the Royal Family. Daddy used to make cabinets, too, and he even made the seats in our church. Our neighbor, Mr. McCracken, said the seats would put the Catholic church to shame, but Daddy said that there was no shame in any church, cheap wood or good wood, everyone sat in the same direction. Reverend Banks said in a sermon that the seats were great works of the Lord, and all the men in the church slapped Daddy on the back and he walked out tall and proud.

He was so tall that he could grab on to the rim of the door in the mill and pull himself up ten times. He worked there all day long, last star to first, and Mammy used to bring out sandwiches to him, a pot of tea, a packet of biscuits.

That was a good while ago now. The doctor said it was a stroke, and when Daddy tried to say things he couldn't. His words were all jumbled like he had too many in his mouth. Mammy moved into my room because Daddy couldn't sleep right, and I moved in with my brothers. She said the room's mine again once Daddy feels better, but that might be a long time.

The worst thing was he wasn't able to turn the pages of his Bible anymore. Then Mammy had an idea. She put hairpins on his favorite pages so they stuck out the top. Daddy was able to move the hairpins using the back of his hand, and he was happy then, even though it was hard for him to make his lips smile like they used to. He has a face that, if you don't know it, you might think he's angry when he smiles, but it's like a special password, the way his mouth turns.

WE made one good pole, and then Mammy said that it was late, we'd keep going the next night. We reversed the tractor out of the mill and left it in the courtyard where it was before, and we put the lock back on the door. Mammy took a rake to the snow to get rid of all the footprints and tire marks.

When we got back to the house, I showed her the secret to keeping quiet on the stairs, staying to the left-hand side, watching for the creak on the seventh step, then stepping real light on the eleventh, and missing the fourteenth altogether.

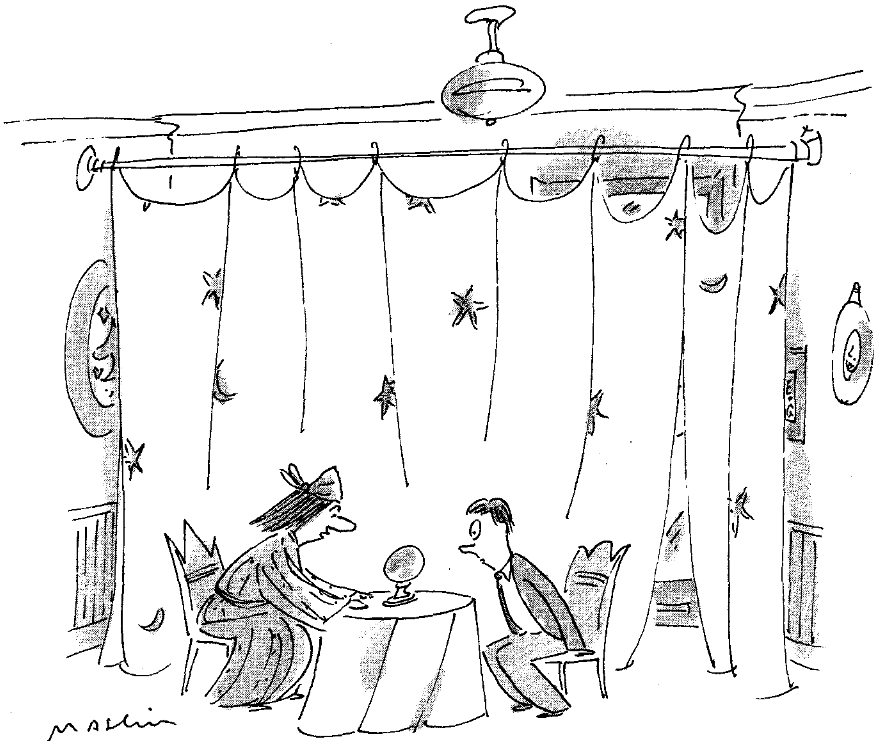
Mammy washed her hands in the sink so Daddy wouldn't smell the wood, and then she went in to wake him up and turn him so he wouldn't get sores on his body.

I heard Daddy say, Your hands are cold, love.

She coughed and said, I was just outside checking on the weather.

And?

The storm's gone.



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Nasty weather, Daddy said, and then I could hear her heaving him over.

She turns him six times a day. First she tucks her hands in under his legs and props them up with a pillow. Then she puts her hand under his back and rolls him over. The first few times she did it he used to moan, but now he mostly just grits his teeth and looks straight ahead at the wall.

Once, when she was rolling him, my brothers and I saw his willy fall out from the gap in his pajamas. Andrew laughed first, and then me, and then Roger. Daddy looked at us and said, Get out, boys. Mammy tucked his willy back in and pulled the drawstring tight.

EACH night, we cut the logs until they were thin, smoothed them out, and made little round rims at the top, so they looked like the front of our bannisters. Then we used paintbrushes to put on the preservative and even some polish so the logs would look nice and fancy and dark brown.

I had never stayed up so late before. We used up all the kerosene, and we had to work quicker to keep our fingers warm. Mammy gave me a pair of gloves, Daddy's old ones. They were yellow, and I thought about the white gloves of the marching men. In my head I could see them, and the big shiny buttons they wear on their coats. I told Mammy that it would be nice to go marching with one of my poles held up in the air. She said nothing.

We made four poles the second night and seven the third. We got so fast that we made twelve on the fourth night. They kept getting better and better.

On the last night, we finished the job early. We stacked the forty poles in the corner of the mill near the door. They were leaning together like a big forest, all smoothed out. Mammy ran her fingers over a couple of the poles, and when she got a splinter in her hand she said, Oh, sugar.

She sanded the pole down again, and we walked back across the courtyard together. She sucked the little bit of blood from her finger. It was late. There were millions of stars in the sky, and the moon was smaller than before. All the snow had melted, and the ground was muddy now.

Mammy went to have a bath, and I went to my room. My brothers were

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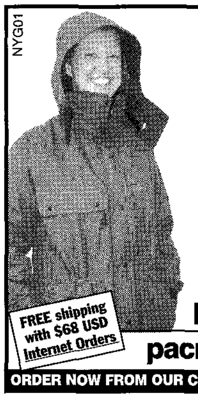

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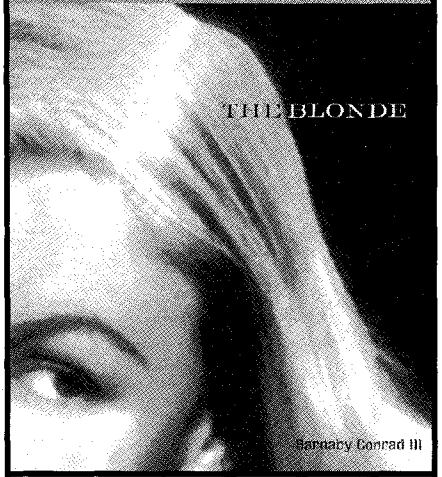

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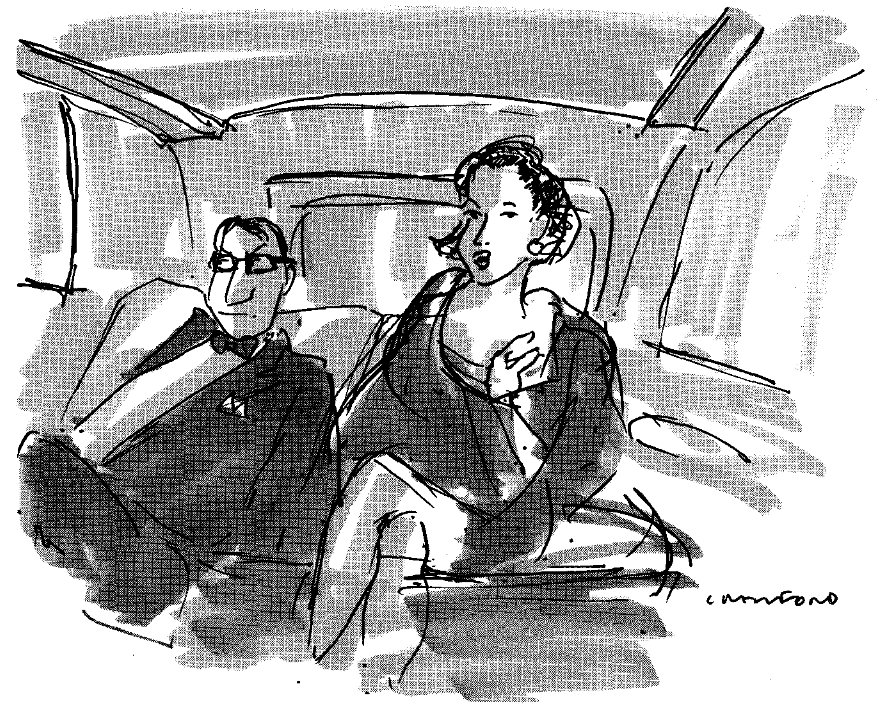


"Loved our evening, Lou. Thanks for being rich."

• •

sleeping away. They were breathing at different paces, and they were a bit like a caterpillar the way they moved.

I didn't sleep very well. I kept tossing and turning, and then I had to help Andrew back to sleep because he started crying. I went downstairs to get him some hot milk, and Mammy was sitting there with her head in her hands. She didn't notice me until I dropped the lid of the cannister and it made a big clang. She pulled me over to her and gave me a big kiss on the head, and then she heated the milk for me.

You know what? she said to me.

What?

I've never done anything before, she said. Not a single thing. This is the first.

I didn't know what she meant. She does things all the time. I said good night, went back upstairs, and pulled up the covers. I was thinking of what the poles would look like with men carrying them along the street. People cheering and drums playing. They would all stand up on the tips of their toes and say, My oh my, look at that, look, aren't they wonderful poles?

When I woke up it was nice and bright, but the wind was blowing hard. The windowpane in my bedroom rattled. Roger and Andrew weren't up yet, so I tiptoed out. Mammy was on the landing, already dressed.

We went into Daddy's room and closed the door behind us. He had the Bible open on his chest. She whispered to him. I knew what she was saying because I knew the plan. She told him I was mad keen on shaving him this morning, was that all right?

Daddy said that would be all right as long as I didn't hack his face to pieces.

I said, Great.

I ran downstairs and heated some water in the kitchen, and then I got the white basin that was made of old china. His blade and the soap were under the sink. The towels and washcloth were already folded on the table. I took a quick look out the window, and Mammy already had the poles stacked up in the center of the courtyard. She was looking up the lane and waiting for the van to come and pick them up.

I balanced the blade across the bowl and carried the things out of the kitchen. I didn't care about the stairs anymore. I even pressed heavier so he would know I was coming. He was waiting for me. He smelled a bit like he needed a bath. I flipped on the radio by the bed, and I turned it up just like Mammy told me to. The news was on—there was something about queues in the petrol stations.

Daddy was propped up on the pillows, and I put a towel behind his head and he gave that funny smile he has.

He said, Heated the water, did you?

I nodded and dipped a washcloth into the bowl and wet the side of his face. I was listening hard under the radio for the sound of the van coming along the lane. There was nothing but the wind. I made a lather with the soap and tried to smooth it out on his face, and my fingers were a little shaky. I took the blade—Daddy calls it a straight-blade—and started where I'd seen Mammy starting, at the bottom of his neck where he has all these tiny little red bumps. He closed his eyes like he always does. The blade went slow. I didn't want to cut him, but he told me to go faster, not to worry, it was a better shave if you went quicker.

You'll do it one day yourself, son, he said.

I heard my brothers getting up in the other room. They were shouting and laughing and hitting each other with pillows.

Daddy moved his head a little and some soap got on his pillow. I wiped it off, then went up along the side of his cheek to his sideburns. I went quickly over the left side of his face. There was still nothing outside, and I was praying the van would come soon.

Music started on the radio, and Daddy told me to turn it off, but I pretended I didn't hear him and kept shaving away. All the black and gray hairs made funny little patterns on the blade, along with the soap. I wiped it carefully on the end of the towel.

He said, Turn the radio off, son.

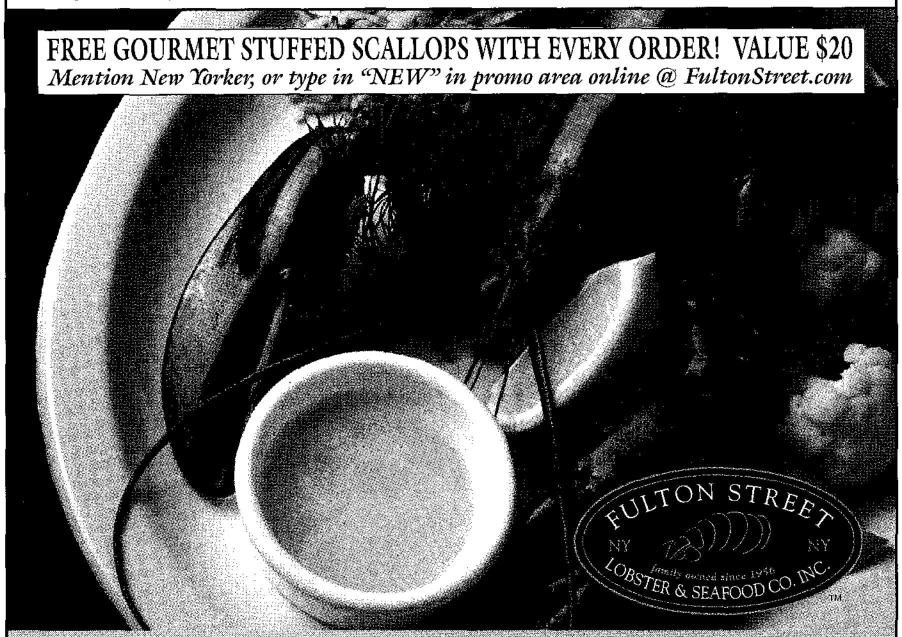
I said, Ah please, Daddy.

Are you listening to your father? he said. Turn that mess off right now.

I reached across and flipped the radio off. Just then I heard the van in the lane and he heard it, too. It turned in at the gate and made a squishy sound as it went through the puddles.

I could see by the way Daddy's forehead creased that he was wondering. I told him it must be the postman coming early, and I pretended to look out the window and said, Aye, it's a red van, it must be the post.

I turned the radio on again so he wouldn't hear any sounds or van doors



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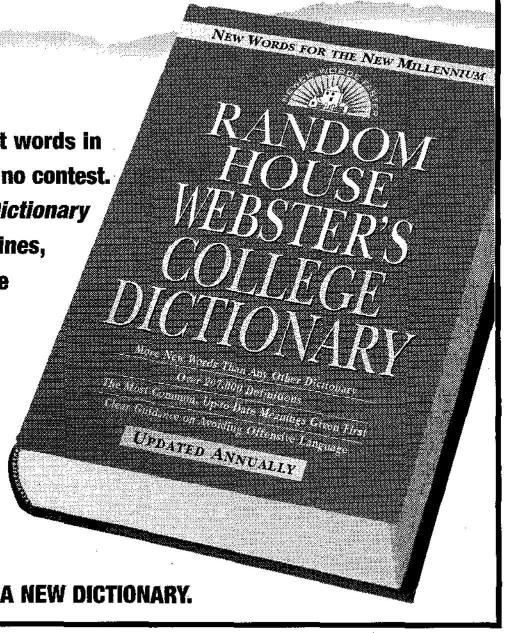
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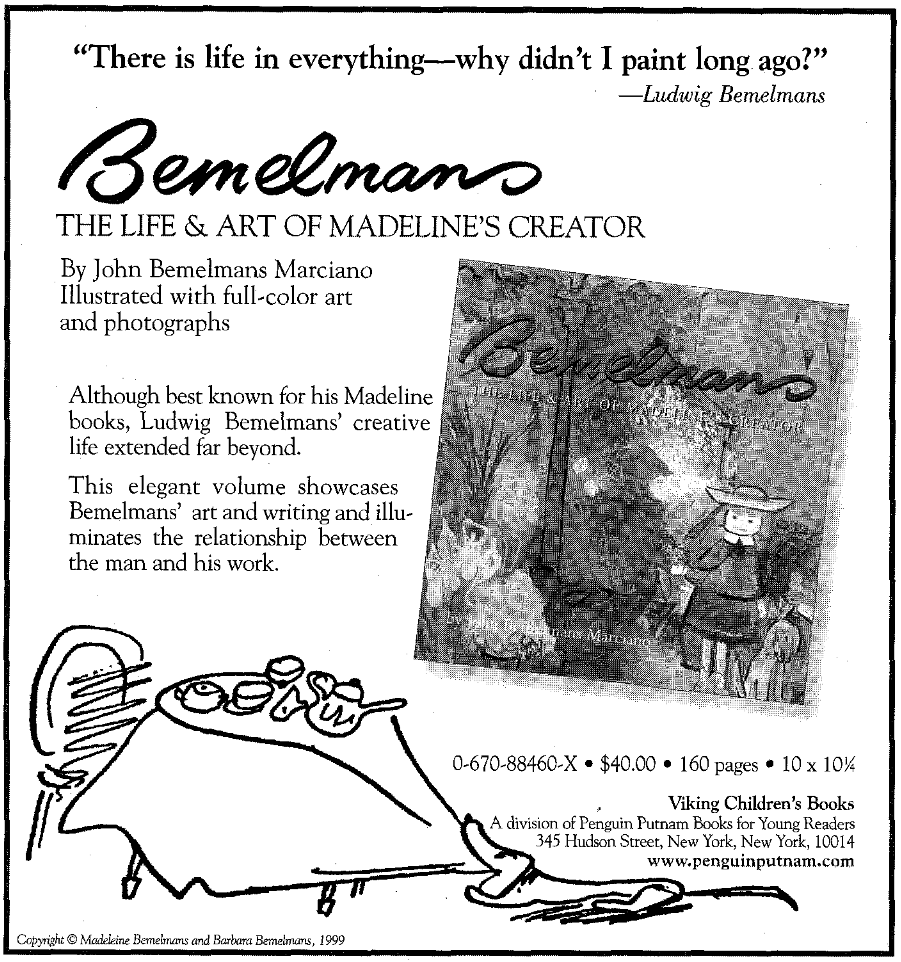

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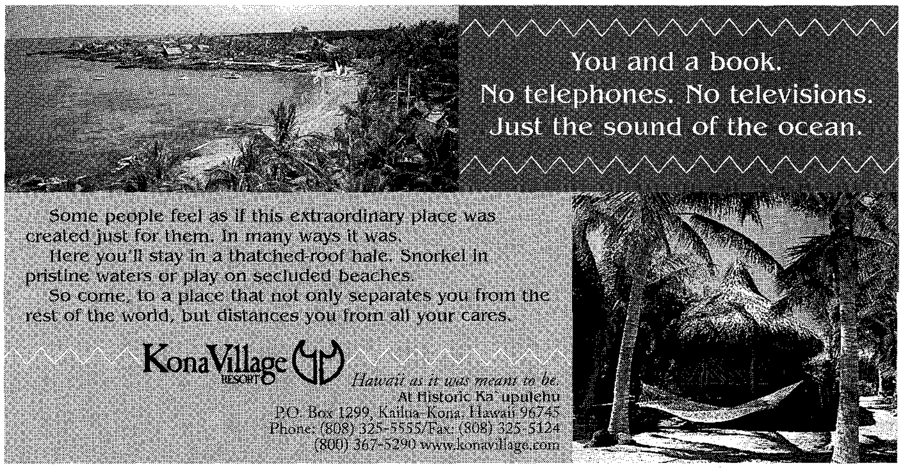

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or the poles being loaded or any other noise that might happen. But he told me to turn the radio off, no ifs, ands, or buts.

I started shaving his chin, and then I moved up to his mustache, and I thought I should have washed my hands better, because maybe there was still the smell of wood and preservative on my fingers. The blade touched against his top lip, but it didn't bring any blood. He wrinkled his forehead, and he looked like he was thinking about something very closely.

They're very early, he said.

Aye.

This is the earliest I ever heard them.

The doors of the van closed with a bang, and I coughed a loud cough. Daddy stirred his back against the pillows and said how it must be a package of some sort, but for the life of him he couldn't imagine who would be sending a package.

I don't know, Daddy, I said.

He asked me to help run his fingers over his face, so I lifted his arm up. We started first on the neck, then the cheeks, then the sideburns, down to his chin, where he rubbed the little hollow between his chin and his mouth.

You missed a part, he said to me.

Shall I shave it?

No, run downstairs, he said. See about that package.

I bolted down. Mammy was still in the courtyard when I got outside. Her hair was blowing sideways in the wind. She had tucked the money away in her apron. She was biting her lip and staring up the lane. The van was gone. My brothers opened the window upstairs and they were roaring down, but I didn't hear what they were saying.

Mammy, I said.

Aye?

He thinks there's a package.

She bit her lip even harder and said, Tell him it was a mistake.

I said, O.K.

She looked at me for a long time, then she turned and went across the yard, taking small steps through the puddles. I looked at the trees behind the mill. They were going mad in the wind. The trunks were big and solid and fat, but the branches were slapping each other around like people. ♦

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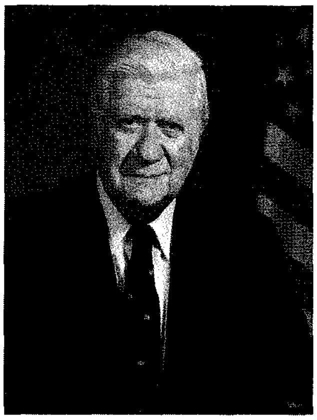

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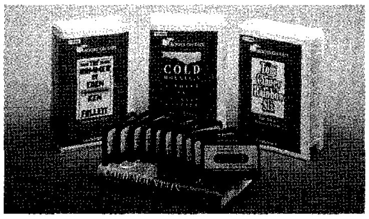

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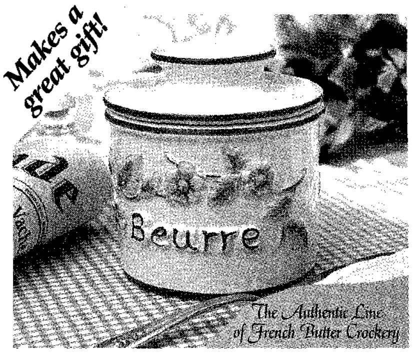

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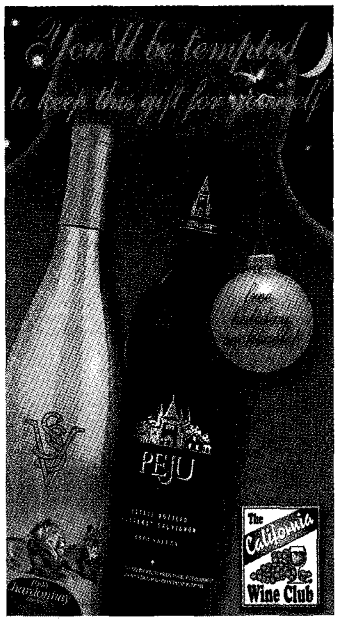

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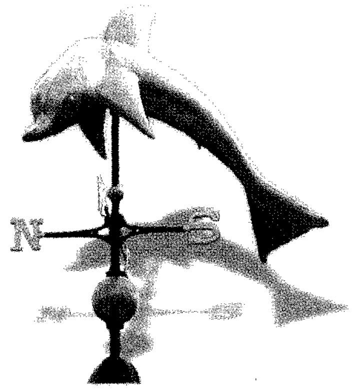

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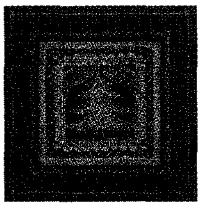

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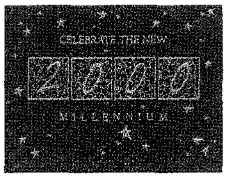

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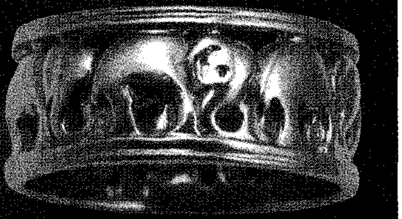

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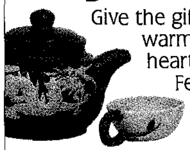

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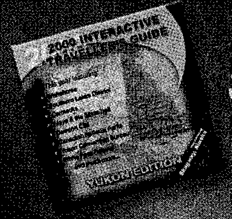

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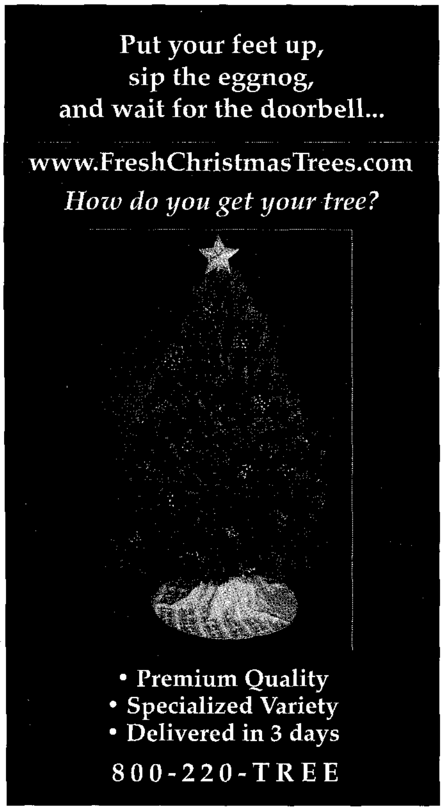

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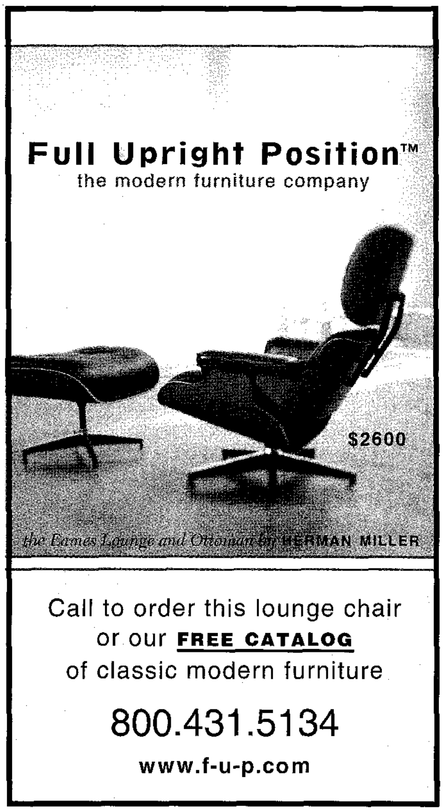

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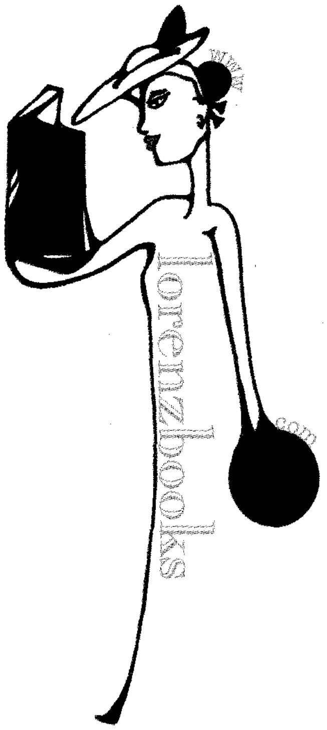
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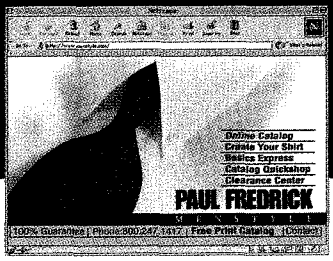
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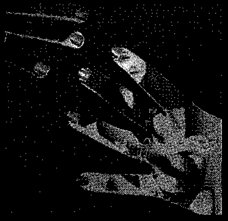

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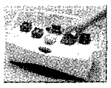

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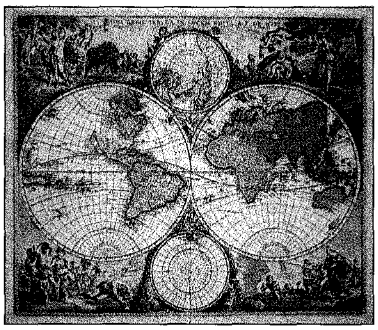

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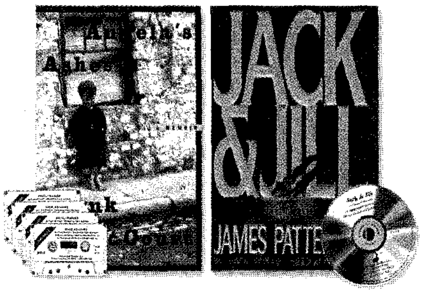

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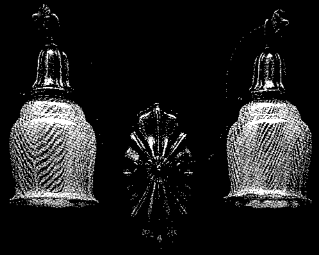

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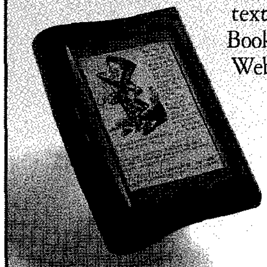

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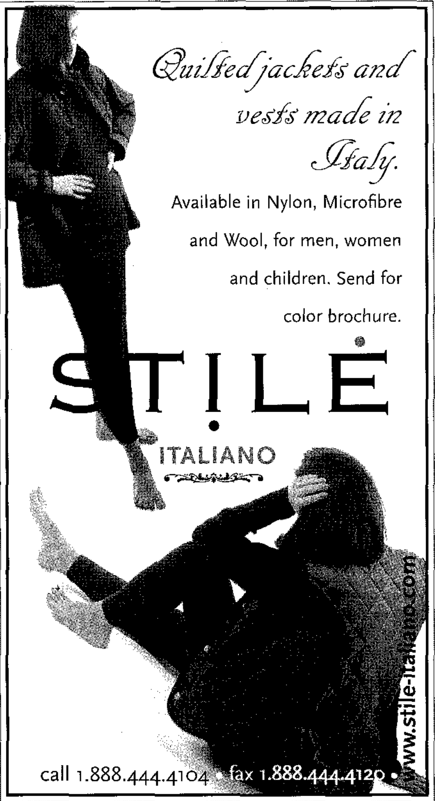

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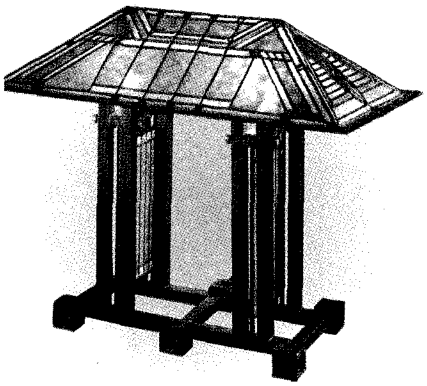

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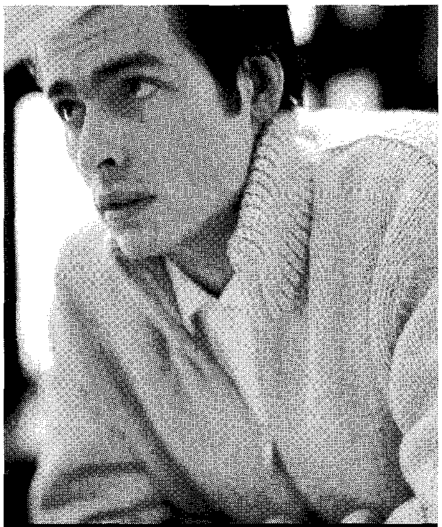

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THE CRITICS

BOOKS

FRENCH KISS

Two biographies of Colette attempt to strip the art from the life.

BY CLAUDIA ROTH PIERPONT

As a first sign of how the affair would end, the beautiful woman refused to wear her pearls—certainly not in the harsh light of morning, when her lover liked to toy with them—because they drew attention to the signs of age on her neck. The young man didn't realize why his mistress was so obstinate; in six years, he had noticed few changes in her. But Léa de Lonval, at forty-nine, knew that love depends on illusion and that both would soon be impossible to maintain. The scenario is familiar enough. Yet "Chéri," Colette's delicate tragedy of love's renunciation, exalts the story's pathos far beyond the boudoir. For Colette, illusion was a necessity of all aspects of life: persistently, she reworked her everyday experiences into a series of fictions that remain as deceptively natural as a string of cultured pearls. Colette's biographers, beguiled by these splendid illusions, inevitably face a problem not unlike that confronted by her ardent young hero, Chéri, who is finally forced to witness the obliteration of the woman he has idealized because of his own insistent pursuit of the truth.

Colette herself possessed a movie star's gift for seductive illusion, and a matching talent for seeing that her charms were well photographed. Small wonder that there have been so many lavish picture books devoted to her life, documenting every carefully cultivated phase of her existence: the pale country changeling of the eighteen-eighties and nineties with a pointed little cat face and a braid down to her hip; the shameless stage artiste baring a cup-of-cream breast in the low-down Paris pantomimes of the first decade of the century; the kohl-eyed empress of letters on her mattress throne in the Palais-Royal, who was by the nineteen-forties indistinguishable from La Belle France. The transformation from waif to siren to Napoleonic sphinx makes for an unparalleled story on its own, and one that understandably threatens to overwhelm the stories she has written.

Yet the most astonishing of Colette's transformations was as a writer, from the precocious author of a turn-of-the-century "Bridget Jones's Diary" into a mature and worthy disciple of Marcel Proust. This may not be the most pictorially arresting of her metamorphoses, but it is the most significant one—and the least explored. Judith Thurman's "Secrets of the Flesh: A Life of Colette" (Knopf; $30) and Claude Francis and Fernande Gontier's two-volume "Creating Colette" (Steerforth; $32 and $27) are the latest in a long line of biographies that examine the writing primarily in its tangled relation to the glamorous life. Critical studies of her work occupy only a sliver of a shelf, since Colette is hardly considered a serious writer by contemporary Flaubert-Sartre-Queneau standards; as she acknowledged, ideas suited her about as well as a feathered hat. She never denied, however, that she had ambitions, and that they were as important to her on the page as in the flesh: a just-ripe perfection of attitude and surface, a vivid sensuality, and, above all, an obsessive care for restoring both the petty thieveries and the ravaging losses of time.

By her own account, she had the happiest of childhoods. Born in 1873 in the tiny town of Saint-Sauveur, in Burgundy, she was the youngest child of the remarkable Adèle Eugénie Sidonie Landoy, a strong-minded, Paris-born woman who married Captain Jules-Joseph Colette after the death of her first husband. Sido, as the Captain called his wife, was opinionated and well read, a connoisseur of nature and a believer in a shocking array of social and sexual freedoms. She was also, as both she and her daughter freely avowed, a woman of mixed race, the daughter of a "quadroon." Francis and Gontier's investigation into obscure archives and colonial records provides a fascinating confirmation of this bit of family lore, but clearly some library scientists, at least, long believed it to be true: the New York Public Library catalogues a substantial proportion of Colette's books as the works of a "black author," and houses them uptown in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, on Malcolm X Boulevard.

Sido's beloved younger daughter was christened Sidonie-Gabrielle and called Gabri by her family throughout her life. She first took her father's last name when she played among her friends, because—as when she wore trousers and a blue beret and talked of becoming a sailor—she sometimes dreamed of being a boy. Granted the same privileges and freedoms as her brothers, she was educated in local schools and grew up with her run of the countryside.

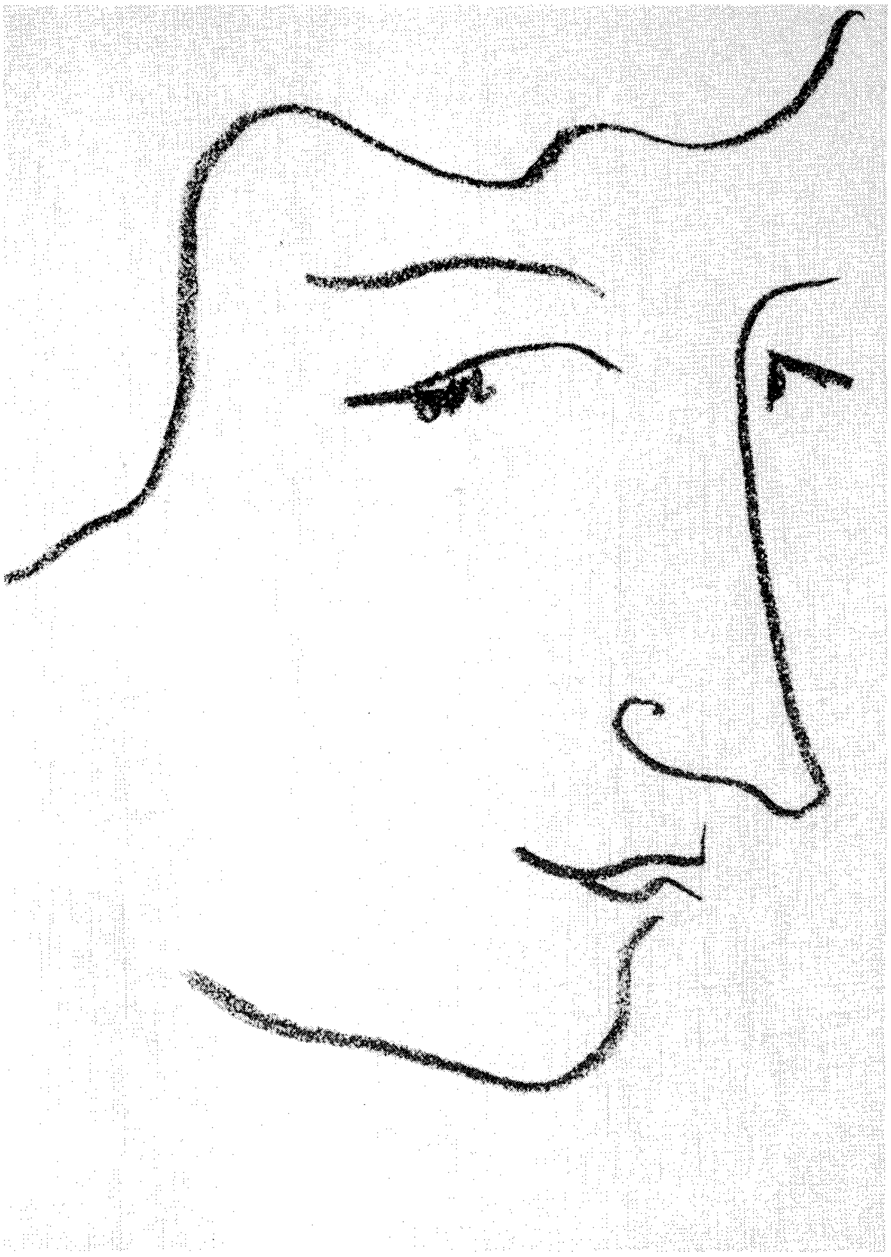
Colette claimed that she had never wanted to be a writer before her first husband, Henry Gauthier-Villars, got hold of her, but this was part of her myth of being a child of nature—a woman so busy living that she could hardly stop long enough to write things down. This myth of the naïve young genius plucked from her mother's garden by a cunning Svengali has proved remarkably durable. The biographical note in the Penguin editions of Colette's books still states that she produced her first four novels—the bulk of the dirtyminded and immaculately written "Claudine" series, published between 1900 and 1903—only because the tyrannical Willy, as her husband was known, had locked her up to do it. (The story is discredited in both of the current biographies, and has previously been treated with more than a little skepticism.)

And yet the legend of a literary life achieved only under duress, or on the fly between adventures, had some truth to it. If Willy did not lock Colette up to write, he did originally sign the hugely successful "Claudine" books himself and sell away her rights. After her marriage ended and her stage career began, in 1906, she frequently wrote because she needed money, meeting a killing quota of articles per month. Some of her best fiction was produced just in advance of the next magazine installment. In 1909, she dashed off a minor classic, "The Vagabond," while making whirlwind tours of some of the seedier theatres of the French provinces, polishing her literary style between rehearsals for a bodice-ripping *mimodrame*, or on the train between cities, using her makeup case as a portable desk.

Colette's delight in the merciless pace and the backstage camaraderie of life on the road comes through in "The Vagabond," a book that also reveals how much writing actually meant to her. The highly autobiographical story of "an itinerant music-hall artiste," it depicts a woman who is so deliberately exhausted that she no longer has time to write, yet for whom the impulse persists—"sharp as thirst in summer." This impulse must be continually fought against, the heroine explains; her writing life officially ended along with her marriage to a brutally exploitative, cruelly unfaithful husband (a character so recognizable that Willy threatened to retort with a novel of his own, titled "Sidonie; or, the Perverted Peasant"). What remained was a raging disgust for the literary milieu and "a stupid fear of man, of men, and of women too."

That would seem to have left her with few romantic options, and, indeed, in "The Vagabond" these theatrical years are explicitly chaste. If, in fact, this was not the case—if, in fact, Colette spent these years under the very public protection of a cross-dressing lesbian descendant of Louis XV, with whom, in 1907, she appeared in a pseudo-Egyptian pantomime that caused a riot in the Moulin Rouge when the two women kissed onstage—her account does possess a bleak strain of emotional truth. For throughout Colette's equal-opportunity sexual life, it seems, men were her torment and women her consolation. Both current biographies inevitably paint these years in the harlequin colors of scandal and high living, yet Colette's oblique self-portrait also describes them as a time of holding back. She was wrestling with the two most exigent of her desires: love of a man and love of writing, each of which contributed to "the fear of becoming once more alive."

In "The Vagabond," these linked desires finally come to seem opposing forces: "A look of his can rouse me and I cease to belong to myself if he puts his mouth on mine? In that case he is my enemy; he is the thief who steals me from myself." This realization prompts the heroine to send her new man packing and, at thirty-three, she declares that she is too old for love. Most of Colette's heroines are either just becoming old enough—both Claudine and the famous Gigi are fifteen, on the brink of losing their magic wildness in order to bow down to a man—or, like Léa de Lonval, on the brink of surrendering romance for the sexless freedom that


Matisse's view of Colette's highly autobiographical heroine in "The Vagabond."

HENRI MATISSE © ARS, NEW YORK/ADAGP, PARIS

had long ago lost its savor. But Colette's vagabond chooses freedom all on her own, spurred not by fears of age and loss (as she pretends to her lover) but by a fierce desire to escape, and to write.

Where is she going? To the place Colette went when she needed respite from the life she had chosen: to the countryside of her childhood, an earthly paradise that is part psychology and part geography and part incitement to a new literary splendor. For in order to convey the physical intoxications of this land, Colette orchestrates a style to match them, combining a keenly discriminating eye (and nose) with sensory rapture, as in her description of the springtime's "scent of honey and pine, of varnished buds and unopened lilac, that bitter scent of the lilac before it flowers, like turpentine and almonds mingled." Such passages give the heroine's pastoral flight in "The Vagabond" a wholly separate life, and hold out a lyric promise that the author would require a dozen more years to fulfill.

"The Shackle," Colette's first novel after "The Vagabond" 's declaration of artistic purpose, was a man-obsessed recantation of all she'd sworn to ("I foolishly wanted to surmount him, taking him for an obstacle when, in fact, he was the limit of my universe"). This reversal coincided all too clearly with her second marriage, to another powerful egoist and womanizer, the newspaper editor and politician Baron Henry de Jouvenel. In December, 1912, Colette abandoned the arty-nudie theatre circuit and her top-hatted lady love to become a respectable politician's wife. After "The Shackle" was published, in 1913, she wrote a flurry of newspaper articles and stories, but she did not complete another novel for six years.

The sudden change is easily attributed to the baneful influence of her husband and the triumph of sex; "The Shackle" supports this interpretation, and Thurman writes extensively of Colette's destructive need for emotional and erotic submission. Francis and Gontier, on the other hand, see Colette as almost invariably strong, and suspect her of no more than coveting Jouvenel's aristocratic title and enjoying her new social position. Yet Jouvenel's primacy, like Colette's creative withdrawal, must surely be seen in the light of her mother's death, which oc-

BRIEFLY NOTED

Enchanted Night, by Steven Millhauser (Crown; $17). After the symphonic grandeur of "Martin Dressler" comes this irresistible chamber piece of a novella, giving hope to insomniacs everywhere. Past midnight on a moonlit summer night, the attics and back yards of a suburban Connecticut town begin to stir: a marauding band of teenage girls roams the streets; an overwrought mama's boy discusses Marx with a woman almost twice his age; and a guy stumbles out of a bar and falls in love with a storefront mannequin. Millhauser is a virtuoso of waking dreams and those hushed moments when "the world, filled to the brim with stillness, suddenly overflows."

The Tiny One, by Eliza Minot (Knopf; $22). When eight-year-old Via Revere says "Mum's dead forever," the redundancy reveals how unfathomable death is for her; until now, her comfortable life in Massachusetts has consisted of "cartwheels and digging with sticks." After her mother's fatal car accident, Via tries to sort through the fragments of her "old" life, and the result is an onslaught of recollection: the escapades of her older siblings, the feeling of her mother's hand in her hair, a motorboat "unzippering" the ocean in its wake. Minot's narrative occasionally falters—a child's internal monologue is hard to sustain—but her prose bristles with vivacity, and her account of Via's connection to her lost mother is never sentimental.

Slapboxing with Jesus, by Victor D. Lavalle (Vintage; $11). Earnest tales of growing up in multi-ethnic Queens fill out this collection, but five of the stories offer high-wire prose about the lower depths. "The strangeness, the terror and joy of selling your ass, subsides," confides a young man who works Forty-second Street, in a story about how wearying the work is, and how minuscule the returns. The no-hopers—boys who want to make their girlfriends "fat" with their "seed," and the pathetic girls they cheat on—are offset by one sterling character, who sees through the destructive swagger of the neighborhood streets and eventually gets himself out.

The Life and Adventures of John Nicol, Mariner, edited by Tim Flannery (Atlantic Monthly; $21). Between 1776 and 1801, the Scotsman John Nicol sailed the world's oceans under the British flag, chasing the American Navy during the Revolution, transporting convicts to the new penal colony in Australia, trading in China, and fighting the French. In this autobiography, which was first published in 1822, Nicol describes the below-decks carnage of naval battle, the atrocious disciplinary methods of the British Navy, and the difficulty of a sailor's finding true love. His voice is honest, artless, and charming, a testimony to human resilience in a cruel time.

Tamara de Lempicka: A Life of Deco and Decadence, by Laura Claridge (Clarkson Potter; $35). By the nineteen-sixties, this once acclaimed, glamorous Art Deco painter was all but forgotten. Even before her death in 1980, however, Lempicka's work began receiving renewed critical attention and appearing in international museum exhibitions. Her prices also rose: "Adam and Eve" went for $1.8 million at Christie's in 1994. Claridge brings tact and insight to the job of unpicking the embroidery with which this aristocratic Russian émigrée adorned the facts of her life, and explains how an artist famous in Europe between the wars fell out of the twentieth-century canon. Lempicka wasn't thoughtful, but Claridge is, and she usefully explores the nature of modernism and women painters' place in it.

In Nevada, by David Thomson (Knopf; $27.50). "How hard it is in life to journey and be open to everything," Thomson writes of one of his nineteenth-century predecessors in the exploration of the West. The author rises to the challenge, however, once he is set loose in Nevada. In this witty account—the polished notes of Thomson's personal inspection of the state—tourists, prospectors, gamblers, and native Nevadans come and go, meeting now and again as though they were random characters encountering one another in the Black Rock Desert. Like anyone who loves Nevada, Thomson has a taste for both wilderness and its opposite—Las Vegas.

It Ain't No Sin to Be Glad You're Alive: The Promise of Bruce Springsteen, by Eric Alterman (Little, Brown; $20). This concise, passionate appreciation of the dominant rock musician of his generation is almost entirely free of show-biz gossip and trivia. Alterman deploys biographical detail sparingly but well, always to the purpose: elucidating his subject's extraordinary body of work, which comprises not only hundreds of songs but also thousands of strenuous, exhilarating live performances. The author, whose previous books have been about politics and foreign policy, makes a case for Springsteen's importance as a chronicler of social pain and, through his music, a creator of community; in this persuasive portrait, Springsteen is a mature artist quite consciously guided by a sense of responsibility to his audience, his country, and his own talent.

The Father of the Predicaments, by Heather McHugh (Wesleyan; $19.95). "No word can clear itself" in this accomplished volume of poems, which illuminates how the contradictions and dualities concealed in language both betray and redeem us. Wrestling with Aristotle's idea that "the father of the predicaments is being," McHugh emerges as a kind of seer, and her striking conceits and crackling rhythms reveal an intellect that is often as sensuous as it is clever. A range of philosophical speculations and quotidian experiences come to life here whenever "the snake of speech" is "stirred."

curred in the autumn of 1912, just three months before her marriage. Sido's death seems to have stripped Colette of her strength, and closed off the childhood paths and country vistas that had so inspired her, ending the possibility of recreating that landscape out of words.

But if this was a period of emotional retrenchment, it was also one of quiet stylistic incubation. Influenced by the new naturalistic art of the cinema, in which she was involved as both a critic and a screenwriter, Colette reëmerged as a novelist in 1919 with a style that fell somewhere between Beaumarchais and Jean Renoir. Her poignant little tale of another music-hall artiste, "Mitsou," gives featherlight expression to an important new theme. Tender Mitsou is deserted by her handsome lieutenant when he discovers that she is not the perfect creature her letters have made her seem. Proust, a polite but distant acquaintance, wrote Colette that he had cried over the final anguished letter Mitsou sends her lost beloved, promising that she will try to become whatever he imagined that she was. ("My dear, I will try to fool you.") Mitsou, at twenty-four, suffers because she failed to foresee the gap between the enchanting illusion that she created and her true self; Colette's next heroine, Léa de Lonval, suffers because she has come to the point in life where she can hardly see anything else.

"Chéri" is another bittersweet drama of two lovers closed off in a hothouse world, this time an aging former courtesan and the vain, spoiled twenty-four-year-old boy she calls Chéri, who wakes with her one morning and, idly playing with the pearls she will not put on, informs her that he is going to be married. This is the opening premise: all the rest is watching Léa come to terms with her loss. Although Colette's style was now beyond reproach, and the lofty *Nouvelle Revue Française* hailed her as a writer reborn, "Chéri" was widely criticized for the triviality of its subject and its characters. But, as Colette's film colleague Max Ophuls described such characters in a work of his own, Léa and Chéri are "only superficially superficial." Long before feminists deconstructed sexual love as a game of power, Colette—who thought that suffragists would benefit from "the whip and the harem"—gave us love as war to the death.

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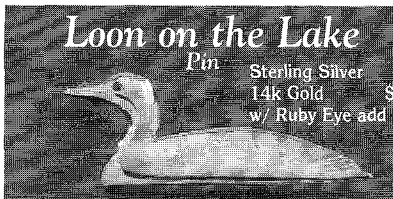

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Chéri may be as pretty as a girl, but his hard chest is curved like a shield; Léa's brass-and-wrought-iron bed glimmers like a coat of mail. The book raises many questions about who is really masculine and who feminine in this candlelit arena, and deliberately misleads us as to who will ultimately survive.

Colette started writing "Chéri" in the summer of 1918, and she was still writing when it began to be serialized in *La Vie Parisienne,* in January, 1920. Suspecting that she had achieved something remarkable, she sent the uncorrected galleys off to Proust. The supple lines of dialogue, the sharp if unenunciated psychology, the coolly inevitable tone, all bore the hallmarks of a pure French classicism. In recognition of this achievement, Colette won the red ribbon of the Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur that September. (Proust won a ribbon at the same time, and announced that he was honored to receive it along with the author of "Chéri.")

After years of seeing Colette's private affairs dramatized in public, many people understandably came to confuse "Chéri" 's sexually defeated heroine with her creator, then forty-seven—particularly after Colette took on the role of Léa in an adaptation for the stage. Nothing was farther from the truth. The last installment of the novel had just been printed when Colette began a long love affair with her sixteen-year-old stepson, Bertrand de Jouvenel, which eventually resulted in her husband's moving out. Far from considering renunciation, Colette had her face lifted and her hair frizzed in a new, young style. She also scotched the marriage that her lover's frantic parents planned for him when he was twenty—just the event in Chéri's life to which Léa soulfully resigns herself. In an adoring story Colette wrote for Bertrand, called "Sunday," she instructed him to "Forget how old you are." What she meant was not that he was too young but that he should stay with her in the childhood they had rediscovered together, in the deserted garden of her mother's house.

THE character of Sido, the heroine of "My Mother's House," is probably the most powerful of Colette's literary transformations. This book, about the author's magical childhood, did not appear until 1922, seventeen years after the death of the Captain and ten years after the death of Sido herself. Colette had only recently taken her first trip back to Saint-Sauveur with Bertrand, at his suggestion. Like so many others, he had protested against the cast of whores and gigolos and theatrical lowlifes in her novels, and requested that she write instead about the country home she had described to him so often. The result of this request was a book that was, indeed, different from anything she'd done before, except insofar as its subject was time and regret.

Colette's fictional Sido was a leaf-and-tendril-trailing Primavera, gaily presiding over a household of tumbling children and basketfuls of cats and pregnant servant girls with nowhere else to go, a slightly plump country woman who smelled of "household soap, of the wax that is used to polish the iron, and of violets" when you buried your face in her skirt. Sido had considered her youngest child—the famous writer who had gone away to Paris—to be "her masterpiece." Now the prodigal had returned to what she called "a world of which I have ceased to be worthy," in order to bring it back to life:

> I can evoke the wind at will and make it rustle the stiff papery blades of the bamboos and sing, through the comb-like leaves of the yew, as a worthy accompaniment to the voice that on that day and on all the other days, even to the final silence, spoke words that had always the same meaning.
>
> "That child must have proper care. Can't we save that woman? Have those people got enough to eat? I can hardly kill the creature."

It is scarcely surprising that such an exalted being, presented as the artist's mother, would attract the biographical long knives. As far back as 1939, Jean-Paul Sartre wrote with evident delight to Simone de Beauvoir, while on a visit to Saint-Sauveur, that according to local rumor "Colette's famous mother" had poisoned her first husband. There is nothing quite so juicy in either of the new biographies, impressively sober-minded studies that command very different strengths. Thurman presents a closeup, consciously modern woman's view of her subject, with occasional needle-sharp insights; Francis and Gontier are more broadly ambitious, offering a panoramic display of relevant cultural detail—the architectural conventions of small French towns, the extravagant length of Burgundian weddings—although the enthralling sweep of their first volume is absent from the second (which seems to have been rushed into print before the authors' notes were converted into prose). Yet, despite dissimilarities, each of these biographies seems set on smashing the maternal icon, and the divergent nature of their charges suggests the irresistibility of the attack.

For Thurman, Sido's celebrated good points are counterbalanced by her effective refusal, as a mother, to let her children go—emotionally, that is, in the contemporary psychological terms that shape this biography. The approach is sometimes useful but often intrusively anachronistic, as when Sido is characterized as an "exploitative master." Francis and Gontier have a vision far less forbidding. Where Thurman finds a counterpart to Colette's history in "The Story of O," their guiding text is the social philosophy of Fourier, and they see Sido's besetting sins as crafty strategizing and miserliness. Where Thurman cites a tale of Sido looking miserable on the morning after her young daughter's wedding as evidence of an unhealthy maternal possessiveness, Francis and Gontier depict Sido scheming to get her dowryless Gabri married off into Willy's bourgeois family. Well, which is it? Perhaps a little of both, but it does often seem in reading these books—particularly Thurman's—that a correctively "humanizing" view has gone too far, and replaced shimmering ideals with excessively dark and equally unreal shadows.

And are we really meant to be shocked to learn that "Sido" is a literary creation and does not entirely reflect the actual Madame Colette? Do we imagine that Proust's grandmother was exactly the woman he so worshipfully depicts? (The two heroines have much in common, including a notably familiar way with roses.) Yet it is genuinely shocking to learn that, precisely in this celebrated matter of mother-and-daughter love, Colette was so unlike what we imagine her to have been. The knowledge seems a blow from which Colette's biographers never quite recover.

"As we all know, the Christmas party is coming up. Are we all thinking about fun spaces?"

• •

COLETTE was newly involved with Henry de Jouvenel, in 1911, when her mother became seriously ill. With ever fainter hand, Sido began writing letters beseeching her daughter to come to see her. And the months went by, while Colette rehearsed for a new play or vacationed with her lover. She visited once, staying two nights, in January, 1912. A letter she wrote to a theatre colleague when she was finally planning another rapid visit—that August, a month before her mother died—contains the continually quoted and unfailingly horrifying notice that "my sainted mother is insufferable," not really sick but simply "having a crisis of 'I wish to see my daughter.'" After this, the fact that Colette didn't attend her mother's funeral hardly seems surprising; she clearly couldn't bear to contemplate illness or death. Two days after Sido died, Colette wrote that she was tormented by the "stupid notion" that she couldn't write to her mother anymore, and that she was experiencing—as whenever she suffered emotionally, she noted—a painful internal inflammation. Her biographers disagree about the particular venereal disease this inflammation represents, but not about the dreadful incapacity of the patient's heart.

Colette's treatment of her daughter is even more damning. Her only child, also named Colette and known by Colette's own childhood nickname, Bel-Gazou (meaning something like pretty baby talk), was born of her union with Henry de Jouvenel, in 1913, precisely nine months after the death of Sido. Many are the lovely fables of children and animals Colette wrote for her daughter; in the closing episodes of "My Mother's House," the nine-year-old appears as a majestic faerie spirit, a fierce little creature able to feel color and see music, a fully worthy successor to her grandmother. But Colette's biographers inform us that Bel-Gazou actually spent her childhood with an English nanny in the distant countryside, where her

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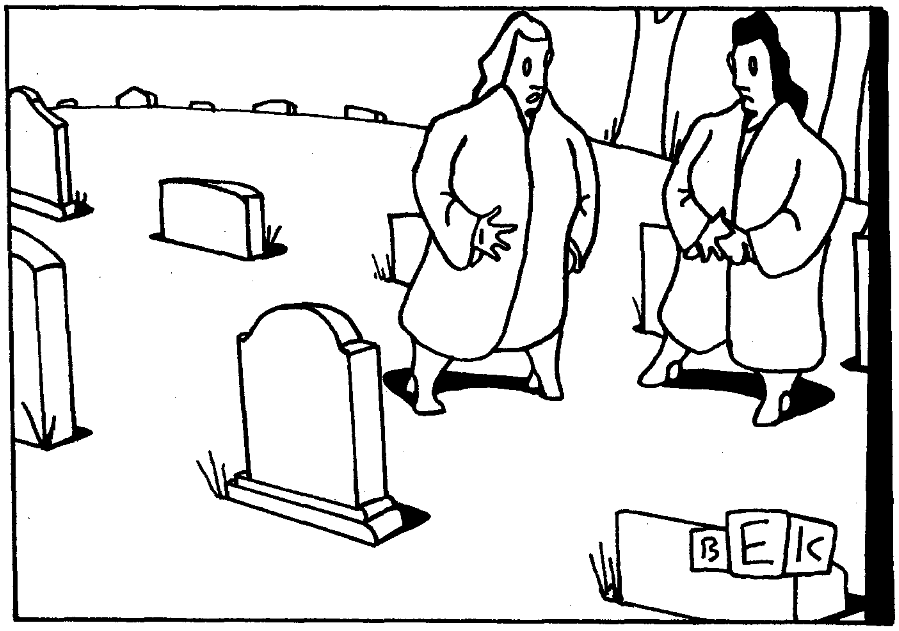
mother hardly ever saw her. The enchanting child whom Colette seemed to glory in was largely a stranger to her, or, worse, a literary conceit. By the time "My Mother's House" was being written, Colette's maternal affections, such as they were, had fully settled on Bel-Gazou's older playmate, her half brother Bertrand.

"I became her adopted son," Bertrand de Jouvenel informed the world years later, and added, edifyingly, "It is rare for natural maternity to give such satisfactions." Such satisfactions as Colette was giving her stepson at the time, surely. Colette seems to have feared that motherhood would supplant her literary powers with its simpler creative rewards. But the mother-and-son eroticism that suffused her relationship with Bertrand—she was continually fretting over his diet, his hygiene, his health—appears to have had the opposite result: in leading her back to Saint-Sauveur, he became the muse. Their journey culminated not only in "My Mother's House" but in its ravishing successors, "Break of Day," of 1928, and "Sido," of 1929. In these works Colette finally redeemed "The Vagabond" 's promise of an earthly paradise recaptured.

The biographers generally accord Bertrand the influence that he claimed, although Francis and Gontier observe, in a single sentence, that it was probably Proust who "launched the creative process." In fact, Colette revered Proust, and had long been following the progress of "Remembrance of Things Past," when, in 1921, he sent her his newest volume: the second part of "The Guermantes Way" and the first of "Sodom and Gomorrah." That July, she wrote him that she read the book every night before she went to sleep, and that her jealous husband (Henry de Jouvenel, still not suspecting what else he had to be jealous of) had to remove her spectacles and put the book away.

Proust's investigations into loss and memory at this point in his work had much to offer Colette. The volume he sent begins with the epic illness and death of his grandmother, and of his own mother's reactions, from her initial "fear of a grief so piercing that she dared not face it" to her final, utter desolation. Proust had also initially avoided his grief; the next available installment of his work, which was published in *La Nouvelle Revue Française* that October, contains the narrator's discovery of the process by which he recovers his grandmother's "living reality," more than a year after her death. Until then, he explains, the frivolity and love of pleasure that had made him often cruelly indifferent to her in life had also kept her memory distant and abstract (and, by implication, useless to his art). The painful but necessary reawakening of memory and feeling occurs only when he returns to a seaside town where he and his grandmother had stayed together, a place where—he presents this nearly as a formula—"the context of sensations



"You can't keep living in the past. Maybe it's time you started killing other people."

in which they are preserved is recaptured." This little trip unlocked the emotional floodgates, and words rushed in.

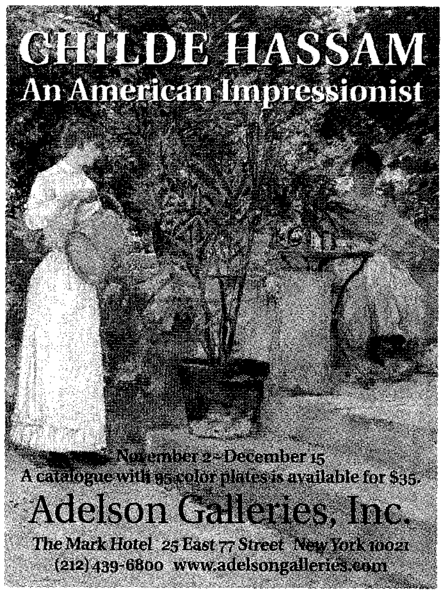
It was a month after her letter to Proust, in August, 1921, that Colette first spoke of a book she had started writing about her childhood and her mother; that November, she and Bertrand set off together for Saint-Sauveur. Through the following months, the stories that would become "My Mother's House" were completed, and Sido was restored to life.

THERE is a different sort of battle against time waged in "The Last of Chéri," a book that falls among the "Sido" volumes like the settling of an old account. In her stories of sexual love, Colette seems to have used her writing as a guard against the future, much as her books about her childhood sought to retrieve the past. Thurman suggests that Colette often forced her heroines into sexual renunciation so that she might avoid the fate herself: novel-writing as a kind of voodoo. It may have worked. "The Last of Chéri," written during the final phases of Colette's affair with Bertrand, reveals this process at its most extreme. Colette began the book in March, 1924, the same year that she foiled Bertrand's impending marriage by causing him to miss his engagement dinner. She completed it late in 1925, some months before she called him to join her on the Riviera, where she introduced him to an elegant youngish gentleman—he was thirty-five to her fifty-two—named Maurice Goudeket, a dealer in pearls, who eventually became her third husband. That night in Cap-d'Ail was the last Bertrand spent with Colette, who drove back to Paris two days later with Maurice.

Bertrand de Jouvenel married shortly thereafter; he had children and a distinguished career and survived quite well. Chéri, however, did not get off so easily. The original volume was set in 1912; "The Last of Chéri" is set after the war, when the amorous young hero has become an incapacitated survivor of a vanished world, unable to grow up or fit in. With the failure of his marriage, he goes off in search of Léa. And, alas, he finds her. She is nearly sixty. He hears her laughter as he approaches the bedroom door, but inside Léa is nowhere to be seen. In her place is a grotesquely fat, boisterous creature—no one could call her a woman, she has even given up on powder—with gold teeth, cropped gray hair, and a quivering lower face that makes her look like Louis XVI. Perhaps the only lovers' confrontation as excruciating as this in modern literature is Humbert Humbert's rediscovery of the hugely pregnant, hopelessly worn Lolita, and his realization, as he takes in all the repellent aspects of what his darling has become, that he still "loved her more than anything I had ever seen or imagined on earth, or hoped for anywhere else." There is no such romantic absolution in Colette. The scene between Chéri and Léa has a forthright, savage honesty. Léa does not seem displeased with what she has become; complete abandonment of the duties of femininity has its compensations. Like all the women invented by Colette, she will suffer but survive. It is Chéri who cannot bear the destruction of his fondest illusion, and who commits suicide.

The doom-dispensing author, by contrast, enjoyed a very happy final marriage. Goudeket was a decent and devoted man, much disappointed in his own achievements and apparently content to be swept up in his wife's artistic force majeure. A half-Dutch Paris-born Jew, in 1941 he was arrested in their home and interned in a camp at Compiègne for several weeks. It was his wife's tireless efforts—and the fact that the German Ambassador's wife turned out to be a fan of hers—that got him out. Colette, then sixty-nine and renouncing none of the duties of femininity, was at the hairdresser's when he arrived home.

Colette has been justly criticized for allowing her work to appear in the most vicious pro-German journals during the war, but then absolved on the basis of her age, or her political obliviousness, or her devotion to her husband. Much of her writing from these difficult years displays a victory of style over substance which may be considered politically French, under the circumstances—as in Gigi's being taught to see the inner fire of really good emeralds, in 1944, or in sheaves of essays on flowers and fruits written as though France's biggest problem were getting enough rain. In her final incarnation, Colette became a figure not unlike the aged and equally in-



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firm Matisse—they died in the same year, 1954—with her perfect line and brilliant color and large simplicity, all put in service of a vision of earthly pleasures as the true sublime:

> For pity's sake, give me so that I can ensnare you the better, give me delicate pastel crayons, colors which have no name, give me glittering powders, and a fairy-brush, and . . . No, for there are no words, no crayons, no colors that will paint for you, above a violet-slated roof embroidered with russet moss, the sky of my native land as it glowed over my childhood.

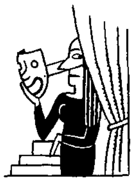
Six months before Colette's death, Bertrand de Jouvenel paid her a visit. She was eighty-one, and the language of seduction was all that she had left, but it was enough. He brought her a bunch of exotic flowers—strelitzia—that she had taught him the name of three decades earlier. She gave him a book of her autobiographical writings titled "The Earthly Paradise," and inscribed it "To Bertrand, the Earthly Paradise, do I make my meaning clear?" Afterward, she wrote him a note: "So you came back, my boy." She requested pictures of his home and children, and hinted that when she returned from a trip to Monte Carlo she might ask him to come see her again. "The mirror will tell me if I may call you," she informed him, and then reconsidered: "But will you still be young enough?" ♦

THE THEATRE

BRUSH UP YOUR PORTER

Reviving the best work of a naughty overachiever.

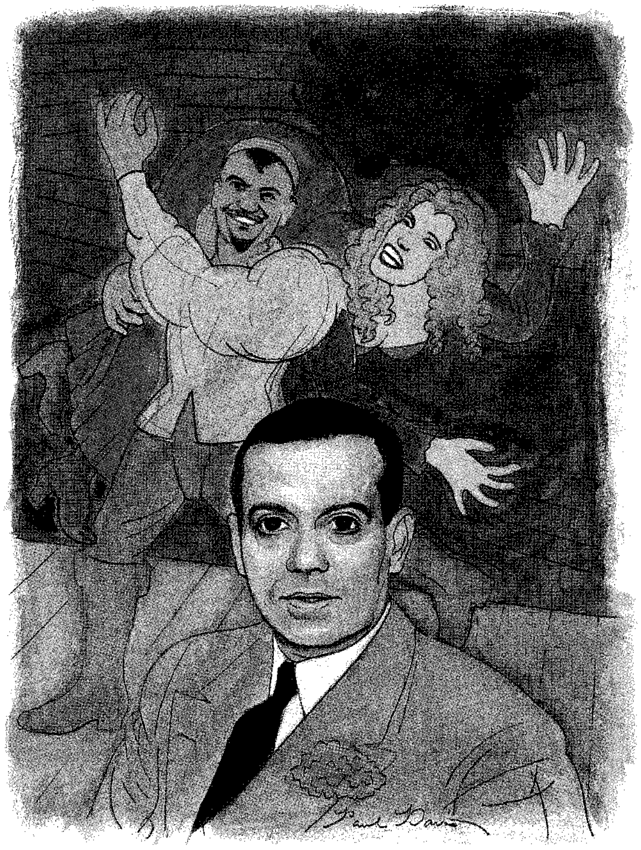
BY JOHN LAHR



When Cole Porter wrote "Kiss Me, Kate," which is now getting a rollicking revival at the Martin Beck, the American musical hadn't yet discovered worry: the only thing the show worries about, loudly, is that it's too darn hot. But in 1948, when Porter sat down to compose the show, which is based on Shakespeare's "Taming of the Shrew," he himself wasn't exactly hot; he wasn't even his producers' first choice. Porter, who was the only patrician among the masters of the Broadway musical, was a witty entrepreneur of his own entitlement. "His songs could make a shopgirl feel that she'd *been* to El Morocco or '21,'" the composer Jule Styne once said. Porter's up-to-the-minute songs were an ongoing chronicle of the caprices of his louche heart and of the de-luxe life he led. The songs worked well in revue and in musical comedy, but in the early forties they were dealt a blow by Rodgers and Hammerstein, whose musical dramas replaced showstopping with storytelling. "The librettos are much better and the scores are much closer to the librettos than they used to be," Porter told a reporter about Rodgers and Hammerstein's stylistic revolution. "Those two made it much harder for everybody else."

Porter, who wrote about eight hundred songs in his lifetime, worked as hard as the next overachiever; he just didn't like to let it show. "Kiss Me, Kate," which was partially inspired by the success of "Annie Get Your Gun," Irving Berlin's stab at an integrated musical drama, was Porter's way of announcing to his peers that anything they could do he could do better—or, at least, just as well. "Kiss Me, Kate" is Porter's masterpiece: at last his impish verbal dexterity and his passion were put effectively in the service of a story. Purists would say—and they'd be right—that at least two of the show's great numbers, "Too Darn Hot" and "From This Moment On" (a satiric rendering, taken from the movie version; it was not in the original stage production), are undramatic and don't advance the plot. But with songs as good as these, who the hell cares?

Porter is Broadway's poet of plenty—sex, wealth, privilege—and "Kiss Me, Kate" offers ample opportunity for him to give voice to his unrepentant materi-



With "Kiss Me, Kate," Porter's impish verbal dexterity and passion were finally put in the service of a story.

PAUL DAVIS

alism. Money and acquisition are at the center of the plot. The womanizing actor-manager Fred Graham (Brian Stokes Mitchell), whose name has been forged by one of his troupe on a poker I.O.U., is being dunned for the debt by two thugs who muscle into his dressing room and then barge onto the stage to protect their investment. Petruchio, the character Graham plays onstage, comes to Padua to "wive it wealthily"; his union with the virago Kate, played by the fading star Lilli Vanessi (Marin Mazzie), is a kind of marriage of inconvenience, made bearable by her dowry. "With a hunny, nunny, nunny / And a hey, hey, hey," he sings. "Not to mention money, money / For a rainy day." In 1919, Porter had married the much older, wealthy divorcée Linda Lee Thomas, whose financial largesse and sexual indifference for thirty-five years allowed her homosexual husband to be true to her in his fashion; his songs preached the gleeful pragmatism he practiced. "There's a madman known as Mack / Who is planning to attack," sings the show's round-heeled ingénue, Lois Lane (Amy Spanger). "If his mad attack means a Cadillac, okay!" In his own bawdy way, Porter also managed a wink at his promiscuity. In "Tom, Dick or Harry," for instance, the chorus sings:

A dicka dick,
A dicka dick,
A dicka dick.

In this revival, which represents the highest level of theatrical collaboration currently on Broadway, the hero is the veteran British director Michael Blakemore. His deft hand is apparent from the show's first beat, which builds Porter's show-biz anthem "Another Op'nin', Another Show" from the stagehands' going about their solitary business—they sweep the floor, check the lights, fix the gels—into a gorgeous ten-minute production number. At the words "It's curtain time and away we go!" the rest of the cast begins entering from the behemoth upstage back door, and Porter's fun machine swings into action. The cunning, massive backstage set by Robin Wagner, illuminated at first with only one rehearsal light, transforms by turns into the bright hubbub of a Baltimore opening night. And every character we meet has a clear dramatic outline. Blakemore is too subtle a director to be showy, but he finds new ways to let the play speak spectacularly for itself. For instance, he interpolates the overture into the bustle of "Another Op'nin', Another Show"—a daring piece of theatrical legerdemain which gives the production terrific liftoff.

A musical is like a military mass maneuver; the director is a kind of general whose success lies to a large extent in marshalling the talents of his lieutenants. Besides Blakemore's own gift for vivid stage pictures, he has inspired his team—the costume designer, Martin Pakledinaz, the lighting designer, Peter Kaczorowski, and the choreographer, Kathleen Marshall, along with Wagner—to the theatrical

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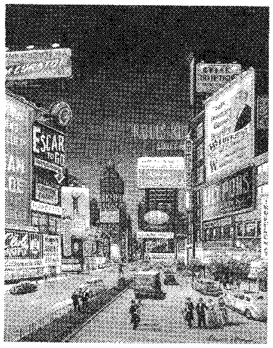

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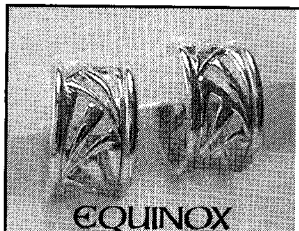

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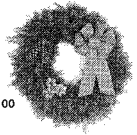

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MRS. M.'S DOLL HOUSE

She's returned to her first
house, a replica her grandfather
built. The number plate's

been polished: the same No. 54,
a brass charm fastened to the door.
On the newel post her mother's

perfume cap, circa 1932.
Her daughter and I used to play
here, like birds we filled

the empty rooms with scraps.
Today, credenzas, lyre-back
chairs, tilt-top tables

of mahogany, cherry wood.
Chandeliers the size
of costume earrings.

And formal dinnerware
she sets with tweezers.
Never again will she say,

"I can't have anything."
The flower painting above
the mantel hides a built-in

safe, inside are thumbnail
tens and twenties. Upstairs,
in the master bedroom, a pair

of slippers, in an armchair
knitting left unfinished, as
if she expected her parents

any minute. This is how
it might have been—
her room next to theirs,

frosted pink, the skirted bed,
a cake made every day for her,
Mother's favorite baby doll.

—MARIANNE BURKE

equivalent of a field day. (Pakledinaz's palette of dark greens, salmon, ochre, and brown gives the show a particular warm, understated lustre.) The producers have had the sense to hire the playwright John Guare to soup up the dramaturgy and the jokes in the original Sam and Bella Spewack book, and Blakemore and Guare together have come up with some good ideas: the reinvention of Harrison Howell (Ron Holgate) as the corn-cob-pipe-smoking General with political ambitions, who briefly whisks Lilli Vanessi off the boards; the placement of "From This Moment On" as a dressing-room comedy

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number, thereby giving Ms. Mazzie's terrific voice something more to sing in Act II.

"Kiss Me, Kate" is built around two tasty pieces of show-biz hokum. The first satisfying running gag is the backstage love spat between the once married stars, which carries over into the stage feud between their characters, Petruchio and Kate. The second is the Mutt-and-Jeff business of the two pistol-packing gangsters, who give the words "pay or play" a meaning all their own. The large one is Michael Mulheren, who has a bouncer's body and a face like a fist. The small one, Lee Wilkof, sports a Jerry Stiller mustache and has a Runyonesque gift for gab. Together, they generate a lot of fun, especially when they find themselves trapped on the wrong side of the curtain and try to sing their way offstage with the rousing "Brush Up Your Shakespeare." Mulheren scowls and threatens the front rows with a fat finger. "Brush up your Shakespeare, / Start quoting him *now*," he sings, to whoops of laughter. The duo could get a dozen encores, but they have to settle for three as they ride the wave of Porter's brilliant naughtiness:

> When your baby is pleading for pleasure
> Let her sample your "Measure for Measure."

And yet, with all its admirable expertise and its various delights, Blakemore's fine production is oddly earthbound. It comes down to the vexing issue of chemistry. Mazzie and Mitchell are expert players; they are not—in the true meaning of the word—star performers, the kind who bring something larger than life to musical stories, which are, almost by definition, less than life. The argument between these bellicose characters depends on equality, but Mazzie seems somehow more emotionally robust than Mitchell, who, though handsome and big-voiced, lacks a certain sense of humor about himself. Likewise, Amy Spanger, in whom innocence and larceny do not coalesce, does well with "Always True to You (In My Fashion)"; but she can't stop the show. In both cases, what's missing is the fizz of extraordinary personality. The final effect is like eating a meal that's been expertly cooked but not properly spiced: it's delicious, but not sublime. ♦

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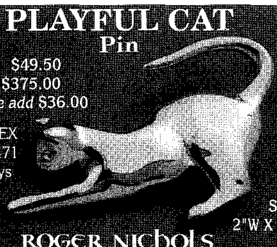

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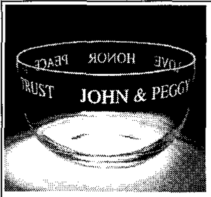

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MUSICAL EVENTS

THE LONG GOODBYE

The New York Philharmonic's millennial premières.

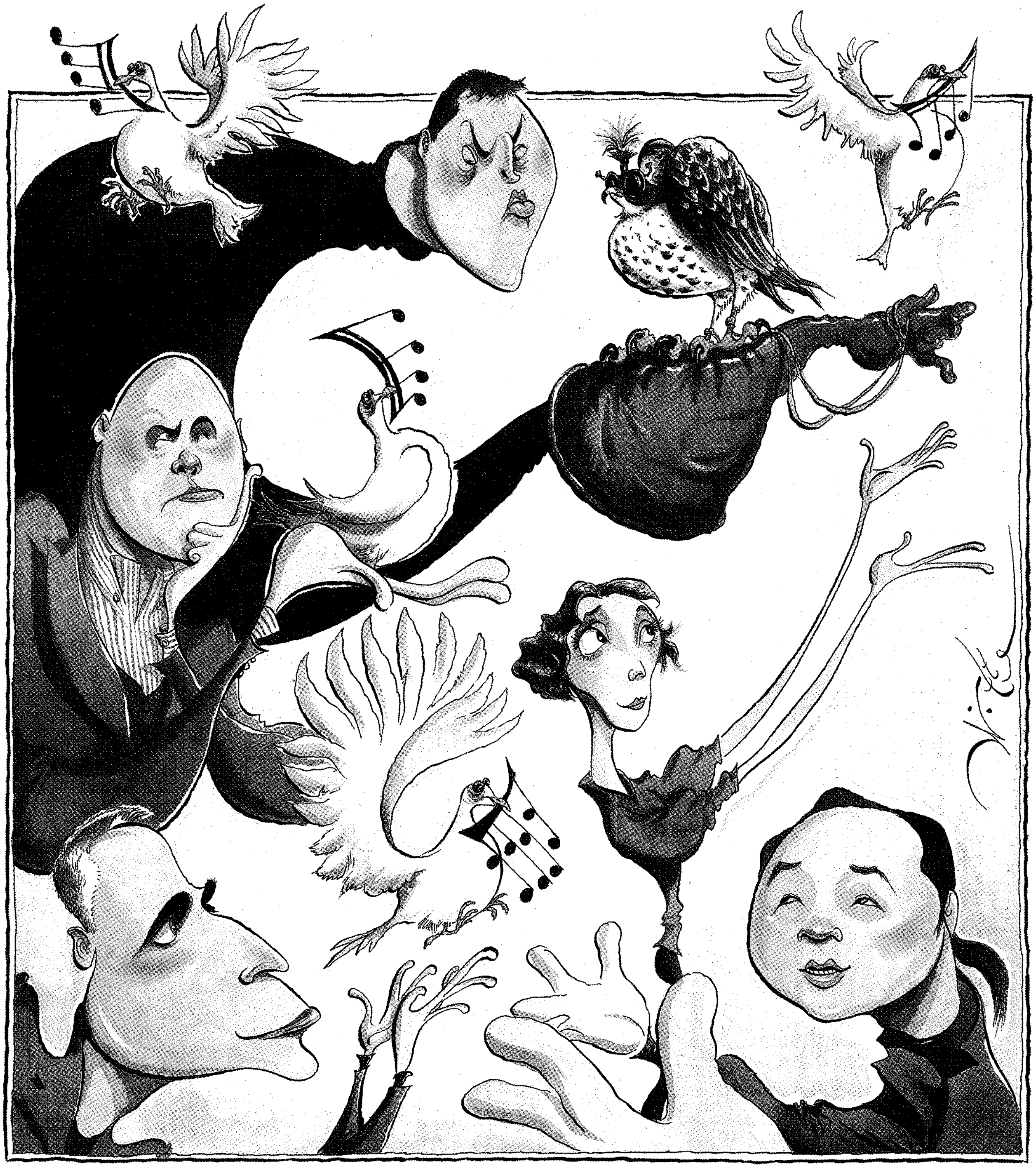
BY ALEX ROSS

"TWENTIETH century, you are leaving us," the poet John Ash wrote several years ago, a bit ironically. "We love you and you are leaving forever." Classical composers, members of a breed that fell from grace as the century progressed, have to feel strange as they say their farewells. In the year 1900, they were celebrities, their quips and foibles reported in the daily papers. In the year 1999, they fly well below the radar of mass culture. Robert Hilferty, a critic and filmmaker who is making a documentary about the octogenarian serialist composer Milton Babbitt, recently accosted shoppers at a Tower Records store and asked if they had heard of Babbitt's music. Not surprisingly, the name rang few bells. Two people confused Babbitt with John Bobbitt, the celebrity eunuch. Someone asked, "Is it on the radio? Is he signed?" The only person who said he'd heard any Babbitt seemed to be in a state of emotional distress. If you had wandered the streets of Vienna in 1900 and asked what people thought of Gustav Mahler, you would have got very different responses.

This season, the New York Philharmonic is giving twentieth-century music a dramatically heightened profile. In October, with the assistance of the Disney Company, it introduced two "Millennium Symphonies," one by Aaron Jay Kernis and the other by Michael Torke. In the past two weeks, Kurt Masur has conducted no fewer than six world premières, this time under the rubric "Messages for the Millennium." Running currently is a festival devoted to Aaron Copland. The Philharmonic has also combed its broadcast archives and released "An American Celebration," a ten-disk collection of American music from the past hundred or so years.

The Philharmonic's support for living composers is laudable, but it raises questions of taste. The "Millennium Symphonies" concert was a debacle for which the orchestra has to take some blame, even if Disney had control of the commissioning process. According to publicity materials, a Disney executive named Michael Eisner was bowled over by a performance of Mahler's Eighth Symphony—Robert Shaw's momentous rendering in 1995 at Carnegie Hall—and asked Kernis and Torke to write something similar. This was a thankless task: the Mahler Eighth is an emanation of sublime megalomania, and composers interested in sanity should not imitate it. Kernis's "Garden of Light" was a murky, overblown symphonic cantata, gesturing frantically in anticipation of a great utterance that never arrived. Michael Torke's "Four Seasons" delighted the ears for a while with its deft tunes and scoring, but its anxious charm became oppressive over the course of an hour. The conclusion, in which members of a children's chorus ran down the aisles and sang "Nyah-nyah, nyah-nyah-nyah," defied explanation, except as some kind of cryptic snub of the gala corporate audience—perhaps along the lines of Shostakovich's supposed critiques of Stalin.

Kernis and Torke, at least, were trying their damnedest, throwing everything they had at the audience. It's hard to say the same of John Corigliano's "Vocalise," which was the only American work on the "Messages for the Millennium" program. It felt prematurely tired, secondhand. The soprano Sylvia McNair twittered wordlessly up and down her range; instruments and electronic equipment emitted various overtones and odd sounds, as if at a young people's avant-garde concert; halfway through, the strings unveiled a big, trite theme that fell somewhere between Britten's "Sinfonia da Requiem" and Strauss's "Death and Transfiguration." The banality of the music was set



The Philharmonic's millennialists (clockwise from upper left): Adès, Saariaho, Satoh, Corigliano, and Henze.

in relief by the pomposity of the program note that accompanied it. The composer explained why he was writing for the human voice: "Its ancient prestige as the most expressive of musical sounds earned it a place at the center of the piece." What a triumph for the human voice, to earn a place at the center of a piece of music! One also learned that Corigliano is preparing a song cycle on texts by Bob Dylan. Perhaps he will also write a "Ring of the Nibelung" on texts by Richard Wagner.

The aggressive bathos of all this millennial Americana left me feeling less than festive, and a little unpatriotic. The "American Celebration" box set came as a corrective. The anthology form is an excellent fit for the material, blocking out the messier patches of a great many American careers. Here, for example, you needn't deal with the gradual, regrettable thinning out of the talent of Roy Harris; his Third Symphony speaks for him blazingly, in a Bernstein performance. Some of the best of Ives, Rug-

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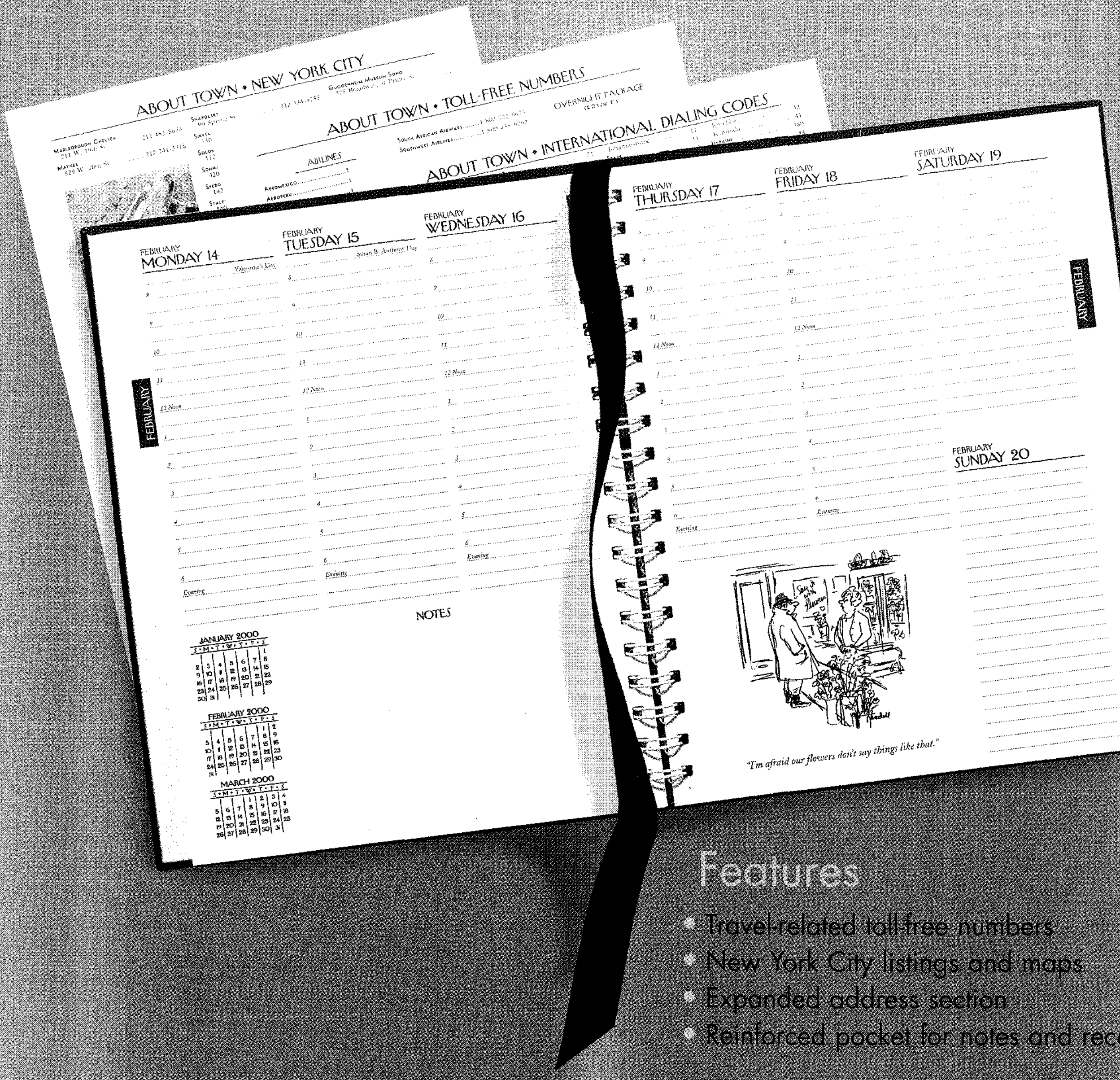
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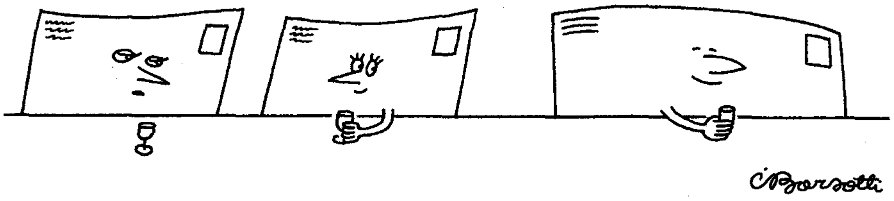

"Careful, kiddo. A lot of junk mail looks first class."

• •

gles, Copland, Barber, and Diamond is on display. Living composers like William Bolcom, Christopher Rouse, and Elliott Carter are in good form. Sedgwick Clark, who produced the set, displayed near-impeccable taste in putting it together. My only complaint is that John Adams was given short shrift, with his "Short Ride in a Fast Machine." But you can take in the full sweep of Adams's career by exploring a new Nonesuch box set, "Earbox," and then by hearing his "Nixon in China" in real time, at BAM next week.

WHAT did "Messages for the Millennium" have to say about the state of contemporary music abroad? Not much, because contemporary music is in too splintered a state to be summarized briefly. Somei Satoh, Hans Werner Henze, Kaija Saariaho, Giya Kancheli, and Thomas Adès made for a rather motley Eurasian crew: one quietly minimalist Japanese, one venerable German, one high-tech Finn, one liturgical Georgian, and one maverick Englishman. Satoh's "Kisetsu" ("Season") fiddled lugubriously with a simple progression in B minor: the effect was of a meticulous dissection of a small portion of Barber's Adagio for Strings. Henze's "Fraternité" remained a puzzle after two hearings, with a lot of delicate virtuoso writing disappearing into foggy orchestration. Saariaho's "Oltra Mar" suffered from a stop-and-start structure, but periodically arrived at shimmering, impressionistic vistas. As of this writing, I have not heard the Kancheli piece, but I am listening to a new recording of the composer's "Lament," and I cannot find the right volume setting for it. Like many of Kancheli's works, it is inaudible one moment and deafening the next.

Thomas Adès stood apart from the crowd. His contribution, "America (A Prophecy)," came across not as a message but as a cry of pain. The music depicted, in no uncertain terms, the destruction of Mayan civilization; the mezzo-soprano Beth Clayton and the Westminster Symphonic Choir sang an uneasy mix of ancient Mayan texts and bellicose sixteenth-century Spanish poems. After the mezzo sang the words "They will come from the east / To break with a cross," the brass pealed forth fanfares in high polyphonic style—a kind of negative magnificence, like the glory of the Renaissance run amok. Brutal dissonances took over, silence intervened, and Clayton resumed her slow, powerful lament. In the second movement, the arching structure of the first was quickly recapitulated. There was another huge climax, this time whiting out into something like pure noise. In the midst of towering cluster chords, the trumpets clung to the singer's falling line.

Some critics have taken "America" as an arrogant, confrontational gesture toward its American audience. I talked to the composer after the first performance, and I got the sense that the piece was a more private matter. Writing in a less brilliant style than usual, he composed and recomposed sections of the work over a period of eighteen months, and at the last minute he changed the ending. What would have been a raucous coda, replete with anvil percussion, became a ghostly one, a cortège of blacked-in, major-plus-minor chords. Adès risked chaos in this music: it's grander and rougher than anything he has done to date, and it lacks his customary playfulness. It seems to have been written out of burning necessity. For that reason, it is the one work from the Philharmonic's end-of-century marathon that is likely to survive the coming years of zeros. ♦

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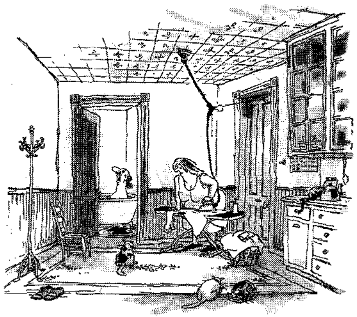

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THE CURRENT CINEMA

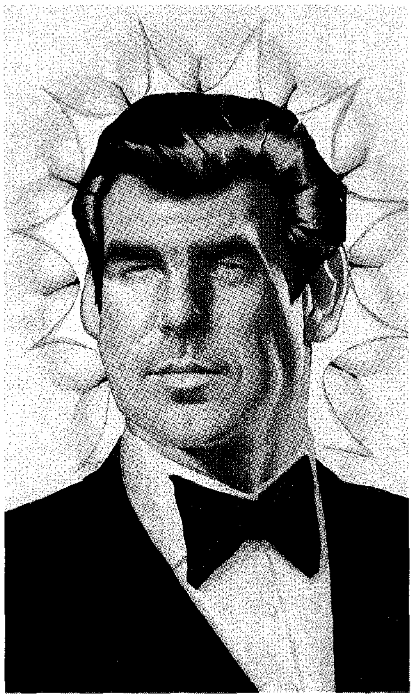
ALL OVER THE MAP

A global 007; Levinson back in Baltimore; and a saucy "Mansfield Park."

BY ANTHONY LANE

EVERYBODY loves James Bond. To be precise: what everybody loves is not so much Bond himself as looking forward to a Bond movie. Even in the mid-eighties, when rumor had it that dear old Roger Moore needed a stunt double for his acting scenes, people drooled at the prospect of yet more 007. That is why the opening sequence of a Bond film is by tradition the best and most arousing part of the picture. The problem is acute with the latest installment, "The World Is Not Enough," whose opening is in fact three sequences—one in Bilbao and two in London. It erupts into a boat chase along the Thames, complete with torpedoes and an emergency dive button; at one point Bond adjusts his tie *while underwater.* After about fifteen minutes, the director, Michael Apted, finally remembers to roll the opening credits. When I saw the movie last week, everyone started clapping and whooping, and I thought, Why not end it there? It's been a great party, the best fifteen minutes of the year; let's go home.

Instead, we get an hour and a half of anticlimax. Only the numb of sense will fail to enjoy themselves, and yet, beneath the fireballs, there is a lowering niggle of sameness: once you've seen one attempt at global domination, you've seen them all. Bond (Pierce Brosnan) is required to save the world's oil reserves, or, at any rate, to forestall a monopoly on oil deliveries to the West. For a plot hook, this is resolutely unsexy; as telecommunications quicken in the next century, will Bond be the only agent still defending heavy industry? Must we expect entire episodes to center on smelting plants and pungent fish canneries? On Bond's side are M (Judi Dench), who gets a chance to leave the office; R (John Cleese), who is slated to replace Q; and Dr. Christmas Jones (Denise Richards), a nuclear-weapons inspector in atomically hot pants. Evil is represented by Renard (Robert Carlyle), a small madman with a hole in the head. Lurking in the middle is Elektra King (Sophie Marceau), an oil heiress in whispering silks with only half an ear. All the folks in this movie seem to be missing bits of themselves.



More suavity, please: Brosnan's Bond could use more good food and wine.

DANIEL ADEL

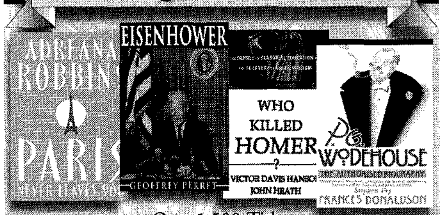
What Bond is missing—and it pains me to report this—is his defining sense of style. Brosnan looks trim, and the narrow lapels of his suits are a touching homage to early Connery, but the film allows him to order one Martini and no more. There's no good food, no wine, no space in which his suavity can expand; if the producers can be bothered to show a Russian caviar supremo (Robbie Coltrane) floundering in his own oil-black product, surely they could give 007 a chance—it would take no more than a line—to prove that he knows his sevruga from his osetra? In a way, Brosnan has preëmpted himself; "The Thomas Crown Affair," which came out this summer, was an investigation of human Bondage, inquiring lightly into the condition of the chronic thrill-seeker. Yet the world was plainly *not* enough for Crown, not unless it contained Rene Russo; there's little in the Bond flick to match that urgency, and even the musky Miss Marceau feels off the scent. Christmas Jones arrives too late in the panicky plot to have much effect, although Bond does get to round off the movie with the immortal words "Always wanted to have Christmas in Turkey."

It's a once-in-a-lifetime line, and I like to think that Apted and his screenwriters shifted the action to the banks of the Bosphorus purely for the pleasure of the joke. Brosnan's Bond is more geographically restless than ever, but somehow less worldly; he seems to be tossed into varying situations in the hope that a touch of personality will leak out. With its regular announcements of location—Baku, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan—this movie should prove a baffling nightmare to George W. Bush, who presumably thinks that Bond's boss is called F or 3, and yet, apart from the initial river run and a contretemps on the ski slopes, "The World Is Not Enough" is starved of fresh air. My heart sank as I realized that the whole farrago would be grinding to its climax inside a submarine. Subs were at their peak in "The Spy Who Loved Me," when the villain built a tanker that ate them, but these days they look *so* Cold War, and viewers may be less than gripped by the sight of the dastardly Renard trying to insert what appears to be a giant ballpoint refill, packed with plutonium, into a small hole. This fiddly finale is miles away from the jubilant, throwaway commotion of the start, but no matter; just before we leave the theatre, the end titles soberly inform us that "James Bond Will Return." I can't wait.

THE new Barry Levinson movie, "Liberty Heights," is as tight and focussed as Bond is footloose. The setting named at the beginning could scarcely be more specific: "Baltimore, Fall 1954." To the inhabitants of this tiny world, even a trip beyond the Jewish quarter of the title is more daunting than space travel. One of our heroes, young Ben Kurtzman (Ben Foster), develops a longing—more knightly than lascivious—for Sylvia (Rebekah Johnson), a black girl in his class. He casually mentions to his mother, Ada (Bebe Neuwirth), that he finds Sylvia, who is arguably the most beautiful being in Maryland, not unattractive. Ada reels at the news. "Just kill me now," she says. "Just kill me now." (If ever a line begged for the slow, proud deadpan of Bebe Neuwirth, the woman with dry ice in her lungs, this is it.) But Ben persists, and takes a streetcar to Sylvia's neighborhood—a wealthy black suburb, and no place for a working-class Jewish boy. Sylvia has to hide him on the floor of her car, from where he can look up her skirt.

All of which should reassure Levinson fans that the man is back to his best. He has the most schizoid C.V. of any American director. There is the rancid corn, like "Rain Man," "Disclosure," and "Good Morning, Vietnam," which is good for headlines and Academy Awards, and then there are the real movies, like "Diner" and "Tin Men." The rough rule—buckled but not broken by "Avalon," and settled by "Homicide: Life on the Street"—is that whenever Levinson goes home to Baltimore he comes alive. In "Liberty Heights," the logistics alone show an artist at ease: he has to juggle the fortunes not just of Ada Kurtzman but of her husband, Nate (Joe Mantegna), who runs a numbers racket out of his burlesque theatre; not just of Ben but of his brother Van (Adrien Brody), who falls for an unreachable Gentile by the name of Dubbie (Carolyn Murphy); and not just of Van but of Van's friend Yussel (David Krumholtz), who gets the best Jewish gag in the movie. Casting a cold eye around an old-money house, lined with antiques and Persian rugs, he is unimpressed—"They couldn't get wall to wall?"

It would have been easy to light the fuse on this combustible material; one day, perhaps, Spike Lee and Barry Levinson could shoot an identical script and see what they come up with. The sign outside the local pool that reads "No Jews, Dogs, or Coloreds" is the earliest indication of what the youngsters face. By the end of the picture, we see them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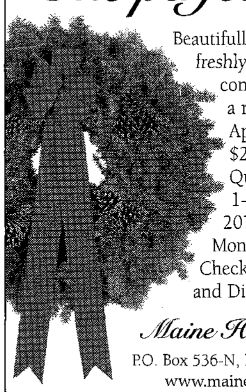
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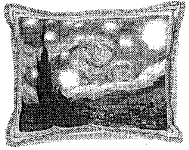
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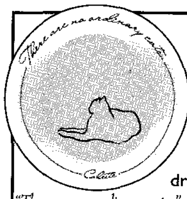

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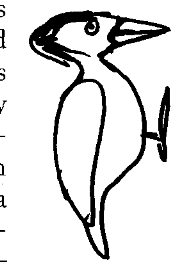
inside, sitting at the water's edge, pale and grinning; their moral victory, like most of the small successes in "Liberty Heights," is no less worthy for being pulled off as a joke. "Burlesque is finished," Nate says, but the beauty of this movie is that, even as the stage darkens, the tradition of light farce seems to spill out through the wings and into the lives of ordinary citizens. Who but Ben, overwhelmed with desire, would cover the damp patch on his pants with an Eartha Kitt album? Who else, when driven home by his girlfriend's indignant father, would refuse to leave the car until the Sinatra track on the radio comes to an end? "You don't walk out on Frank, sir," he explains. "It would be too disrespectful."

Some people will find this film itself too softened with respect; when Van's rival in love turns into a friend, and when even a kidnapping is resolved with no harm done, it is tempting to dismiss the result as an unhelpful dream—easy listening for social historians. But there are little prods of pain throughout; the meltdown of the frosty Dubbie, cashmere and all, is not easy to watch. And Levinson's command of period is so assured that you follow him as loyally as Ben on that streetcar. If "Liberty Heights" wants to sell me a vision of ethnic strife as abrasion rather than revolution, as a smarting opportunity for nostalgia, then, for once, I'll buy it—just like Nate Kurtzman sidling out of synagogue to visit the automobile showroom, where he can worship the new '55 Cadillac in mist green.



NUDITY, sexual abuse, lesbianism, a dash of incest—will we never tire of Jane Austen? The newest and naughtiest take is Patricia Rozema's "Mansfield Park," which should not, in all honesty, be mistaken for the novel of the same name. Most of the characters show up, but few escape the Rozema makeover. Fanny Price (Frances O'Connor), whom generations of readers have found a little on the sniffy side, becomes shrewd, equable, and cautiously game; she certainly doesn't flinch when Mary Crawford (Embeth Davidtz) starts unlacing her wet bodice on a rainy day. Rozema's trick is to turn her heroine into a writer, and to have her declaim some of Jane Austen's letters as if they were Fanny's own. As cheating goes, this is so flagrant that everyone concerned deserves to get away with it.

The movie, designed by Christopher Hobbs, is splendidly unlush; tracked by a deliberately indecorous camera, the various lovers and stiffs disport themselves on hard chunks of furniture in echoing rooms. What luxury there is goes into the performances; I must confess myself terrified by the presence of Harold Pinter as Sir Thomas Bertram. He sweeps about in a gold cloak, juts his jaw like a Blackshirt, and pinches the cheek of his newly ripening niece with more salivary approval than is proper. We are made endlessly aware, whether we like it or not, of Sir Thomas's holdings in the Caribbean, and of his bestial attitude to slave labor; Jane Austen would need smelling salts to sit through this macabre stuff, but Edward Said, who has pointed out the shady economic backdrop to the novels, should lap it up. Like any act of creative vandalism, Rozema's movie urges you to reponder the original; I am now convinced, for example, that Fanny gets it wrong, and that instead of playing safe with the nice Edmund (Jonny Lee Miller) she should have plumped for the local supercad, Henry Crawford (Alessandro Nivola), with his saucy sister to be phased in as an optional extra. As one of the characters exclaims, "This is 1802, for Heaven's sake!" Of course it is. ♦

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REVELATIONS

A guide to the photographs by Richard Avedon on pages 92–107.

1. Standing nearly sixty feet high, the granite statue of Gomateshwara is one of the holiest pilgrimage sites in Jainism, a radically ascetic religion with four million followers which dates back to the sixth century B.C. Jains, whose discipline of strict non-violence inspired Gandhi, believe that Gomateshwara was the first mortal in the current cosmic cycle to have achieved Nirvana. The depth of his meditation is symbolized by the spiralling vines that have grown up his limbs and by the anthills and snakes at his feet.

2. Renunciation is fundamental to the life of a sadhu, or holy man, of the Shiva-worshipping Naga sect of Hinduism. To help control his lust, which he believes diminishes his spiritual power, the sadhu has covered himself with ashes, rubbed earth on his penis, and suspended three rocks, weighing eighteen pounds, from it with a holy cloth. Every twelve years, over the course of four months, the Hindu sects meet at a festival in Haridwar, on the Ganges. In 1998, it was attended by a hundred thousand sadhus and ten million pilgrims.

3. The three stripes of white ash and the red dot on the forehead of the man on the left identify him as a Hindu worshipper of the Lord Shiva. He and his companion, a leper, wait to be fed in the courtyard of a temple on the Hugli River.

4. Cardinal Antonetti, born in Novara, Italy, in 1922, is now a president emeritus of the administration overseeing the financial holdings of the Apostolic See.

5. Every day at sunrise and at sunset, a Hindu priest offers prayers for the river goddess at Dasaswamedh, the main ghat on the Ganges. In the evening ceremony, a hundred and eight lamps, representing the metaphysical texts of the Upanishads, are lit, while boys who serve at the nearby Golden Temple pour oil onto freshly picked leaves, ignite them, and float them down the river, to the sound of bells and chanting.

6. At Easter, a group of men put on white hoods and robes, chain their legs together, and walk barefoot through the streets behind a statue of the Madonna. The men, called *los picaos*, pray and flagellate themselves with ropes, and their welts are then pierced with pieces of broken glass until blood flows from them. The *picaos* believe that by repenting in this way at the feet of the Virgin they are absolved of their sins.

7. A Naga sadhu practicing physical restraint wears a chastity belt and holds his arms in a yoga position. To prove his loyalty to his guru, he will walk naked across India.

8. Chaudhuri was born in East Bengal, now Bangladesh, and spent several years working in Calcutta as a civil servant and as secretary to the Nationalist leader Sarat Chandra Bose before becoming a writer. In 1951, when he was fifty-three, Chaudhuri published his first book in English, "The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian." His other books include "Hinduism," a major study that reëxamined the early roots of the religion. Chaudhuri died in Oxford last August, at the age of a hundred and one.

9. A graduate of the Sorbonne, Sœur Emmanuelle became a Roman Catholic nun in 1931. She spent years living among an underclass of destitute garbage collectors in Cairo, establishing shelters, clinics, schools, and needlework coöperatives. In 1989, she founded an association that cares for children in ten countries. For years, Sœur Emmanuelle, now ninety-one, received devotees at the retreat in the South of France where she now lives.

10. Photograph taken from a rickshaw on a back street in a Muslim quarter.

11. Devout Hindus believe that when they die the best way to find release from the circle of life is to be cremated at the Manikarnika Ghat, on the Ganges. On cold mornings, street dogs lie in the warm human ashes.

12. The Ecumenical Patriarch is the two-hundred-and-seventieth successor to the Apostle Andrew. The son of a Turkish barber and coffee-shop owner, he was enthroned in 1991 as the spiritual leader of three hundred million Orthodox Christians. He was in Pittsburgh to celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese in the United States. Known as the Green Patriarch, for his interest in the environment, he has his own Web site, www.patriarchate.org.

13. A Tibetan nun holds a child who says that, in Tibet, when his mother refused to take off a necklace bearing the image of the Dalai Lama, Chinese soldiers tortured her to death. His father died trying to take him to India, across the Himalayas. The child's frostbitten feet had to be amputated.

14. Tenzin Gyatso, the Dalai Lama, who has lived in exile for forty years, photographed at a Tantric college. ◆

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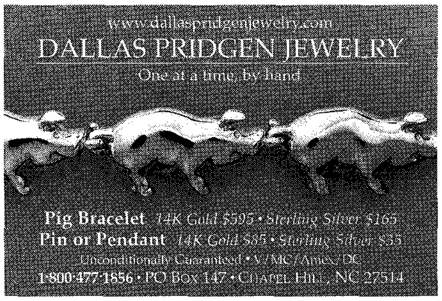
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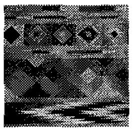
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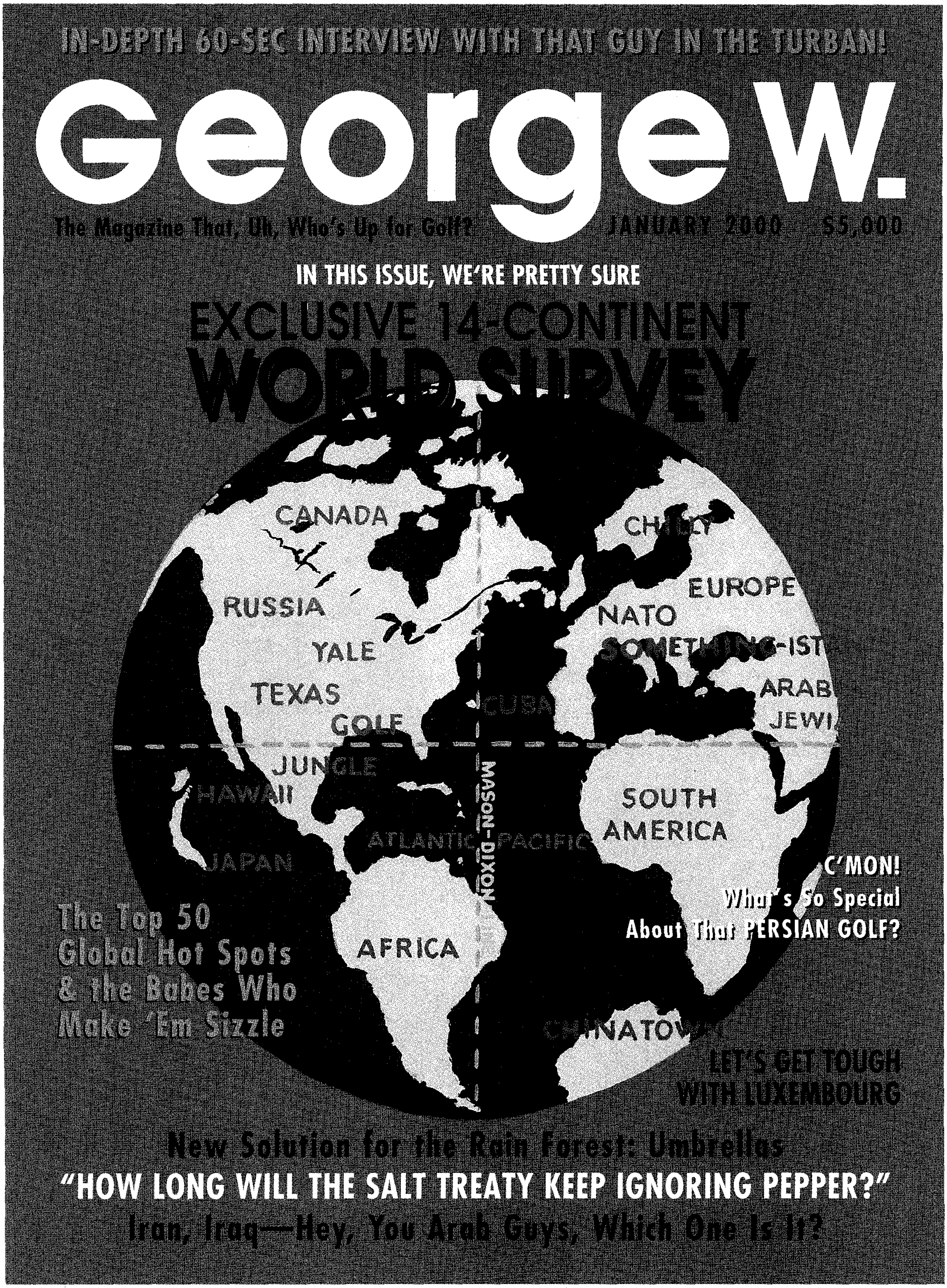

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